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Who are the reporters covering environmental issues in the United States? As the first step in a nationwide series of regional studies of environment reporters conducted over time, the researchers identified and interviewed 55 environment reporters working for New England daily newspapers and television stations in winter and spring 2000. The study found environment reporters working at half the region's newspapers and only four of the television stations. The New England environment reporters ranked everyday, practical journalistic process concerns such as time constraints and the size of the news hole as the most frequent barriers to reporting on the environment. They also said their sources most often came from government, and their stories often contained a variety of factors, including a human-interest angle, a government angle, and a pollution angle. Many wished to aid the environment while still remaining objective in their reporting.

The Environment Reporters of New England

DAVID B. SACHSMAN

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

JAMES SIMON

Fairfield University

JOANN MYER VALENTI

Brigham Young University

Who are the reporters covering environmental issues in the United States? Do environment reporters in print and television news differ from other journalists? Just as earlier studies of American journalists have provided a record that helps us understand the realities of news professionals, this work offers a layer of findings about those specialists who report on the environment. Such

Authors' Note: The authors' names are listed in alphabetical order; each contributed equally to the study. Address correspondence to David B. Sachsman, West Chair of Excellence in Communication and Public Affairs, 210 Frist Hall, Dept. 3003, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, 615 McCallie Ave., Chattanooga, TN 37403; phone: 423-755-4219; fax: 423-785-2199; e-mail: David-Sachsman@utc.edu.

Science Communication, Vol. 23 No. 4, June 2002 410-441

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continuing research about journalists, their attitudes about what they do, and why they choose to specialize is useful both to the history of the profession and in order to move beyond anecdotal and stereotypic generalizations.

Today almost every news reporter may be called on to cover breaking stories about the environment. The police reporter or general assignment reporter arrives at the scene of an accident—an overturned truck—and learns that some kind of spill is involved that cannot easily be cleaned up. The road is closed in both directions, a special cleanup crew is on its way, and a normal two-hour traffic delay accident story is now a six-hour closed-highway toxic-spill accident story.

Even more common is the government environmental story. Government is the dominant source for environmental news (Brown et al. 1986; Gans 1979; Greenberg et al. 1989; Lacy and Coulson 2000; Sachsman 1973; Sigal 1973; Smith 1993; Taylor, Lee, and Davie 2000; Valenti 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b). The federal government breaks environmental stories almost every day, state government agencies are major sources of environmental news, and many local government meetings have at least one environmental item on the agenda. Government reporters, whether they cover the president, the governor, or the city council, must be prepared to cover environment stories. And local beat reporters, who cover everything that happens in their areas, from zoning board meetings to leaking underground storage tanks (at gas stations), have more than their fill of environment news (Lovell 1993). Some daily newspapers and a much smaller number of local television stations employ specialized environment reporters—that is, reporters who, because of their expertise, their experience, or even just their willingness, have been given a regular (though often part-time) environment beat. But even at those newspapers and television stations that employ environment specialists, the first-day story of the spill, the accident, or the city council meeting is almost always covered by the reporter on the scene, the general assignment reporter, the government reporter, or the local beat reporter (Sachsman et al. 1988). Specialized environment reporters usually do not get there until the second day—or until the evacuation has been ordered. There are just too few of them to be everywhere at once.

Thirty years ago, the environment beat often was part of the science beat, the province of the specialized science reporter at larger newspapers (Sachsman 1973). Today the environment belongs to reporters on many different beats who recognize that ecological issues overlap their areas. So many environmental issues spill over to the business pages that the environment often is a business story as well as a government story or an accident story, a local beat story, an outdoors, nature, or hunting and fishing story . . . and, yes, a science and health story (Ward 2001). Some journalism texts stress the need to frame

environment stories broadly and the need for environment reporters to be knowledgeable about a wide range of topics that extend well beyond threats to nature (Izard, Culbertson, and Lambert 1994; The Missouri Group 1999).

Environment specialists become knowledgeable in many of these areas, and they bring to their media an intense focus and a level of in-depth coverage beyond that possible on the first day of most breaking stories (Davis 2001; Sachsman 1973; Sachsman et al. 1988; Valenti 1995). Because they are few in number, they touch only a handful of the environmental items handled by their media. But where these specialists exist, they make a difference, helping readers and viewers differentiate between environmental claims and legitimate threats to the public health, between manipulated statistics and carefully conducted research (Bruggers 1998). These specialists provide a model of environmental reporting worth emulating by the general assignment reporters, government reporters, and local beat reporters who cover most of the breaking stories.

Studying Specialized Environment Reporters

This study is the first step in a nationwide series of regional studies of environmental reporters conducted over time. This research examines only specialized environment reporters, those journalists who, because of their expertise, their experience, or their willingness, regularly write about environmental issues or cover an environment beat. In particular, this research involves only those specialized environment reporters who are full-time journalists employed by daily newspapers or television stations. And the first stage of this project, the findings reported here, covers only the environment reporters of New England. (Stage 2 of the project studies the environment reporters of the Mountain West states. Stage 3 will cover the Southern states, and so forth.)

“The Environment Reporters of New England” is descriptive research, a study of the specialized reporters of a single region in a single slice of time. As such, it attempts to answer a number of basic questions:

- Who are the environment reporters of New England?
- Where do they work? For which media? In which states?
- How do they differ from the typical American journalist? How well are they educated? Are they younger or older? Are they more or less experienced? What, if any, are their political leanings?
- What do they see as the key elements of environment news? Who are their news sources? What prevents them from doing a better job? Do they view their editors as supportive? What do they think of their jobs and about the way other

reporters cover the environment? How do they balance the journalistic goal of objectivity with any personal feelings they have toward protecting the environment?

The context for this study derives from professors David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit of Indiana University, who conducted major studies of the American journalist in 1982 and again in 1992 (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996). These nationwide surveys provide excellent baseline data and a proven survey instrument. This study of New England's environment reporters was designed, in part, to determine how environment journalists compared to Weaver and Wilhoit's baseline data for all journalists. We anticipate further comparative research as both their work and our work continues.

Method

There was no master list of environment reporters in New England on which to base a study. This project created a master list and used a snowball-referral approach to reach the participants in this first attempt at a census of the region's environment reporters.

An overlapping, multistep process was used to identify the reporters. First, names of reporters were culled from several sources, including the membership lists of the Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) and the National Association of Science Writers; a public relations guide that listed specialists at news organizations; the public affairs offices at environmental agencies in each of the six New England states, which provided lists of reporters with whom they dealt; the press office of region 1 (New England) of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which also provided a similar list; and any listings for environment reporters in the *1999 Editor & Publisher Yearbook* or the *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook 1999*. This task was complicated by the high turnover rates of journalists listed in the various sources and the fact that lists like the SEJ membership directory may be incomplete.

The study also sought to identify environment journalists whose names were not included on any of these specialized lists. Therefore, a master list of all daily newspapers and over-the-air television stations was compiled from the daily newspaper section of the *1999 Editor & Publisher International Yearbook* and from the "Directory of Television Stations in the U.S." section of the *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook 1999*.

All of the environment reporters who were listed on one or multiple lists were called. If no name was identified from the overlapping lists, a top

newsroom official (usually the managing editor or news editor for newspapers, the news director or assignment editor for television stations) was identified and called. The reporter or editor was asked whether the news organization had a full-time "beat" reporter covering the environment. If not, they were asked to identify reporters who cover a variety of issues, including the environment, but write about the environment on a regular basis. Once any such reporters were identified and interviewed, that reporter was asked if there was anyone else in the news organization or in competing news organizations who should be called.

In all, fifty-five environment reporters were identified from March through June 2000. Each of these reporters completed the forty-five-minute telephone survey interview, a 100 percent response rate.

Does this mean that there were only fifty-five specialized environment reporters working for daily newspapers and television stations in New England in the winter and spring of 2000? While the study tried to be inclusive, counting, for example, reporters who had just started covering the environment on a regular basis and had not yet done many stories, judgment calls were made that excluded a number of others.

The study excluded those reporters who were assigned to a specific city, town, county, or region and covered all issues pertaining to that town, including the environment, because they were considered generalists rather than specialists. As discussed earlier, these local beat reporters cover many breaking environmental stories, but they are general reporters who cover the environment, rather than specialized environment reporters. This project sought to distinguish between these two groups, concentrating on the specialists rather than the generalists.

For the same reason, this study also excluded those full-time television weather reporters in small markets who also occasionally handled an environment story such as storm damage.

It also left out former environment reporters who had recently taken on another assignment. That this category is even mentioned may be a sign of the times. The researchers know a number of journalists who have left the environment beat in recent years for a variety of reasons. In future research, these reporters should be studied to find out why they left the beat. This study focused on current, active full-time reporters who cover the environment.

In a similar vein, the project left out three reporters who were on leave for medical and professional reasons at the time of the interviews. Since the researchers could not determine whether these reporters would have qualified for inclusion in the study, they have not been counted. However, it can be argued that instead of a 100 percent completion rate of fifty-five subjects, the project had a 95 percent completion rate of fifty-eight possible subjects.

The *Christian Science Monitor*, headquartered in Boston, required special handling due to its national audience. The *Monitor* then employed three environment reporters who only worked part-time for the newspaper. They were excluded due to the study's focus on reporters who work full-time for their media. The paper did have a full-time environment reporter, but that person was stationed in the Rocky Mountain states (as of May 2000), and therefore the reporter's views were not necessarily representative of journalists covering the environment in New England. As a result, the *Monitor* was excluded from the study of New England.

Another special case involved a reporter who worked half-time for two affiliated newspapers; he was counted as a reporter for each newspaper in the geographic and circulation breakdowns, but he was counted only once as part of the overall numbers of environment reporters in the region, and he was interviewed only once.

A different reporter covered the environment in a state other than the home state of the newspaper. This reporter was counted in his home state for questions relating to him personally but was counted as part of the newspaper's overall count of environment writers in the geographic and circulation breakdowns.

Findings

Where Are the Environment Reporters?

The six-state region called New England had eighty-two daily newspapers and fifty-two television stations that were included in this study. While *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook 1999* listed eighty television stations, thirteen of these were public broadcasting stations that had companion stations elsewhere in their state sharing the same offices and/or personnel. Another thirteen stations were satellite retransmitters or digital transmitters, and two more were listed as "not yet on the air." That left fifty-two television stations in New England that at least had the potential of having independent news operations.

Thirty-three (63 percent) of these television stations listed the presence of a news director or regularly scheduled news programming in *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook 1999*. Twenty-eight were affiliated with one of the four major commercial networks: CBS (six stations), NBC (seven), ABC (nine), and Fox (five), or Univision (one). In addition, one station in Presque Island, Maine, was affiliated with CBS, NBC, and ABC. Of these twenty-nine network-affiliated stations, twenty-eight had news directors. Three of the

sixteen unaffiliated UHF stations had news directors, as did two of the seven public television stations and statewide public broadcasting networks in New England.

Only four of the thirty-three television stations with news operations employed specialized environment reporters: the ABC affiliate in Boston (the sixth largest market); the NBC affiliate in New Britain, Connecticut (a UHF station in market 27); the CBS affiliate in Burlington, Vermont (market 91); and the CBS affiliate in Bangor, Maine (market 155). What can be made of such small numbers? They point to the emergence of two hypotheses: that most television stations with news operations do not employ a specialized environment reporter and that most television news directors do not see the need for a reporter to cover the environment on a regular basis or feel they cannot afford one. While all four of the television stations with environment reporters were network-affiliated commercial stations, the great majority of such stations in New England did not employ an environment reporter.

The findings were quite different for New England's newspapers, which were far more likely to employ environment reporters. Forty-two (51 percent) of New England's eighty-two daily newspapers employed a total of fifty-one environment reporters during the time period. It is a region of small newspapers. In this study, the newspapers ranged in size from a daily circulation of 2,690 to 457,942, but the median circulation of all New England papers examined (not only those with an environment reporter) was only 17,668. Overall, newspaper circulation size correlated moderately with the presence of an environment reporter (Pearson's $r = .464$, $p < .001$). (See Table 1, which collapses the circulation data into four groups, allowing the groups to be compared regarding the presence of environment reporters.)

Among very small newspapers and medium to large papers, the size of a newspaper's circulation helped to predict whether a specialized environment reporter would be present. Twenty-three (82 percent) of the twenty-eight papers with a circulation of less than 14,000 did not employ environment reporters, while only four (15 percent) of the twenty-seven newspapers above 30,000 circulation had no environment reporters. However, it was not possible to predict the presence of an environment reporter among newspapers with circulations between 14,000 and 30,000. Despite the fact that these are still small newspapers, fourteen (52 percent) employed a total of sixteen reporters who covered environmental issues on a regular basis.

Different states also reflected a difference. Six of the seven newspapers in Maine employed a total of nine environment reporters, while half of the papers in Vermont and New Hampshire employed none. Four out of the six newspapers in Rhode Island had no specialized environment writers, although the 167,381-circulation *Providence Journal* had three. Connecticut,

TABLE 1
Number of Environment Reporters by Newspaper Size

<i>Number of Environment Reporters</i>	<i>Newspaper Circulation</i>				<i>Total Newspapers</i>
	<i>Less Than 14,000</i>	<i>14,000- 29,999</i>	<i>30,000- 60,000</i>	<i>More Than 60,000</i>	
0	23	13	4	0	40
1	4 ^a	12 ^a	10	8	34
2	1	2	0	3	6
3	0	0	1	1	2
Total	28	27	15	12	82

a. A newspaper with a circulation below 14,000 shared a reporter with a 14,000-29,999-circulation paper. Both newspapers were counted as having an environment reporter, although the reporter was counted only once as part of the overall reporters in the region.

with its high population density, had four daily newspapers with two environment reporters, eight papers with one, and only six papers with none. Massachusetts, the most populous state in the region, had one newspaper (the 457,442-circulation *Boston Globe*) with two environment reporters (one of whom was stationed in New Hampshire), eleven newspapers with one, and nineteen (61 percent) with none.

Who Are the Environment Reporters?

Do the environment reporters of New England in 2000 differ from the typical American journalist in the 1992 Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) study? How well are they educated? Are they younger or older? Are they more or less experienced? And, so on.

Weaver and Wilhoit (1996, 36) noted that there were some regional differences among journalists, and so differences between New England environment reporters and national baselines may be due, in part, to such regional differences. They also found changes over time. Thus, differences between New England environment reporters in 2000 and baseline data from 1992 may be due partly to the difference in times. And yet some differences between New England environment reporters and the baseline data may be due to real differences between environment reporters and others.

Age and Experience

The New England environment reporters were older, on average, than the reporters in the Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) study. Some of these differences

may be due to the fact that the baseline data were drawn eight years earlier than the New England study. A large cohort entered U.S. journalism in the 1970s (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996), and many reporters who were hired in the 1970s were still younger than age forty-five in 1992. They might now be older than forty-five, if they are still in the business. And yet 51 percent of the New England environment reporters were forty-five or older in 2000, a number so high that it cannot be explained away by the general increase in hiring journalists during the 1970s.

The advanced age of 51 percent of the New England environment reporters may be partly attributable to a beat-specific cohort effect. The number of environment journalists increased in the 1970s and early 1980s, and some of those reporters are still working as journalists (Sachsman 1996). In this study, half of the New England environment reporters had covered the environment for nine years or more, and 22 percent had continued with the specialty for twenty years or more. Environment reporters may be likely to stick with the beat, growing older in the process, or the environment beat may be the kind of choice assignment that would go to an older, more experienced reporter. Forty percent of the New England reporters had been journalists for twenty or more years, suggesting that many of them were already experienced reporters when they came to the beat.

Education

Weaver and Wilhoit (1996, 37) found that in 1992, journalists working in New England led the nation in terms of education, with 91.4 percent college graduates. This is similar to the percentage of New England environment reporters in 2000 with college degrees, 89.1 percent. *The American Journalist in the 1990s* (p. 33) did not report the percentage of New England journalists with graduate degrees but found 11 percent with graduate degrees on a national level. This is far less than the 30.9 percent of New England environment reporters in 2000 with graduate degrees. Part of this difference may be regional or due to the different time periods. Some of the difference probably may be related to age. Weaver and Wilhoit found that journalists between ages thirty-five and forty-four and between forty-five and fifty-four had more graduate degrees (14.5 percent and 15.6 percent, respectively) than the national average (p. 34). Since New England environment reporters in 2000 tended to be older than other journalists, it follows that these older reporters had more graduate degrees. But it is highly unlikely that any combination of region, time, and age completely explains the high number of New England environment reporters with master's degrees or higher. The association between graduate education and environment reporting may also include

both graduate-educated reporters who become environment reporters and environment reporters who obtain graduate degrees.

Religion

One of the authors of this article suspected that a nationwide study of environment reporters might show differences in religious background, based on earlier reported studies of a small convenience sample (Valenti 1995). While the study of New England environment reporters in 2000 did find 40 percent Catholics, compared to Weaver and Wilhoit's (1996, 14) 1992 national findings of 29.9 percent, part or all of this difference may be explained regionally. The number of New England Catholics is higher than the national average. New England also is home to more Jews, which may explain the 10.9 percent of the New England environment reporters who were Jewish, compared to 5.4 percent in the national database (p. 14).

However, the New England environment reporters trailed U.S. journalists and the U.S. population in general in terms of the importance of religion and religious beliefs. Only 19 percent of the environment reporters said religion or religious beliefs were very important to them, compared to 38 percent of the U.S. journalists in 1992 and 61 percent of the U.S. population as a whole in 1992 (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996, 14). When the respondents who said religion was "very important" or "somewhat important" were combined, the gap between environment reporters and U.S. journalists narrowed (67 percent vs. 72 percent, respectively), but the contrast to the U.S. population (a combined 91 percent) remained clear.

Ethnicity

Only one New England environment reporter was African American (1.8 percent), compared to 3.7 percent in the Weaver and Wilhoit (1996, 11) study. None was Hispanic or Latino, Asian or Asian American, or Native American compared to 2.2 percent Hispanic, 1 percent Asian American, and 0.6 percent Native American in the 1992 study of U.S. journalists. While these numbers are too small to suggest meaningful differences, the lack of diversity is apparent.

Gender

The New England environment reporters in 2000 were 70.9 percent male and 29.1 percent female, compared to Weaver and Wilhoit's (1996, 8) national findings of 66 percent and 34 percent. Based on earlier preliminary

studies (Valenti 1995), some evidence suggested that this specialized beat might include a higher percentage of women, even though the membership directory of the Society of Environmental Journalists reflected a two-thirds to one-third male to female ratio.

Marital Status

Fifty-eight percent of the New England environment reporters were married in 2000, 29 percent were single, 7 percent cohabiting, 4 percent separated, and 2 percent said they were divorced. Weaver and Wilhoit (1996, 9) in 1992 found that 65 percent of the men and 48 percent of the women were married. Similarly, among the New England environment reporters, 64 percent of the men and 44 percent of the women were married.

Income

Considerations other than income appear to have motivated the respondents to enter the environmental journalism field. More than one-third (39.6 percent) of the New England reporters in 2000 earned less than \$35,000 a year. Nearly half (47.2 percent) earned between \$35,000 and \$60,000, while only 13 percent made more than \$60,000. The results likely reflect the number of small newspapers and small market television stations in New England. Weaver and Wilhoit (1996, 92-94, 273 Q81) asked about income in 1992, with a cutoff at \$35,000, and reported a median income of \$31,297 nationally and \$33,461 in New England for the previous year.

Political Leanings

At first, the results regarding the political affiliation of U.S. journalists in 1992 and New England environment reporters in 2000 appear very different. In 2000, nearly two-thirds of the environment reporters (63.6 percent) called themselves Independent or said they belonged to no party. Of those remaining, far more called themselves Democrats (30.9 percent) than Republicans (5.5 percent).

The near doubling of the percentage of Independents—from 34.4 percent in 1992 to 63.3 percent in 2000—may reflect a growth of Independents across the country in the 1990s. As a result of the growth of Independents, both political parties saw a lower percentage of New England environment reporters identify with them in 2000 than U.S. journalists in general in 1992.

But when the New England environment reporters who were party identifiers were combined with those who said they leaned toward a party, different results emerged. When the environment reporters who were leaners were included in the 2000 results, the percentage of Independents was very similar in the 2000 and 1992 surveys: 36.4 percent were Independent in 2000, 34.4 percent in 1992. There was a 12.3 point difference (56.4 percent to 44.1 percent) between the percentage of environment reporters who identified themselves as committed or leaning Democrat in 2000 and the U.S. journalists who said they were Democrats in 1992. And there was a 9.1 point difference (7.3 percent to 16.4 percent) between the environment reporters in 2000 who identified with or leaned toward the Republicans and the U.S. journalists in 1992 who said they were Republican. In 1992, the ratio of journalists who identified themselves as Democrats compared to those who identified themselves as Republicans was nearly 3:1. In the 2000 survey of New England environment reporters, when “leaners” were included, the ratio was more than 7:1.

Job Satisfaction

The overall job satisfaction of journalists has been dropping for quite some time. The change in the “very satisfied” response, over time, is striking. For example, while 49 percent of U.S. journalists said they were “very satisfied” with their jobs in 1972, this measure had dropped to 40 percent in 1982-1983 and 27 percent in 1992. In comparison, only 20 percent of the environment reporters in New England said they were “very satisfied” with their jobs in 2000.

The reporters also were asked to rate which characteristics were important to them in judging jobs in their field. Fifty-one percent of the New England reporters in 2000 said that they considered their employers’ editorial policies and the amount of autonomy on the job “very important.” Editorial policies (69 percent) and autonomy (51 percent) also were very important to U.S. journalists in 1992 (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996, 101). The chance to develop a specialty was very important to 35 percent of the environment reporters in 2000 and 40 percent of the journalists in general in 1992. Job security was much more of an issue to journalists in 1992 (61 percent) than it was to environment reporters (18 percent) in the economic boom times of spring 2000. U.S. journalists in 1992 also were more concerned with helping people (61 percent) and getting ahead (39 percent) than were the environment reporters (29 percent and 16 percent, respectively) in 2000.

Media Usage

Which news organizations help set the agenda for environment reporters? The environment reporters of 2000, like the U.S. journalists in 1992, mentioned the *New York Times* most frequently as a paper they read at least once a week (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996, 22). The *Times* was cited by 67 percent of the environment reporters. Other top newspapers reflected the New England orientation of the study, as reporters mentioned the *Boston Globe* (49 percent), *Hartford Courant* (16 percent), and *Boston Herald* (13 percent) far more than the national sample of journalists in 1992. The *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times* all were popular sources of information among both the environment reporters and U.S. journalists.

The environment reporters, not surprisingly, were also more likely to read magazines associated with environmental issues (*National Geographic*, *Outside*) than the national group of journalists.

Most environment journalists relied on sources other than television news for their information. More than two-thirds (69.1 percent) of the reporters watched one or zero days of network news, and 60 percent watched the same small amount of cable TV news. There was, however, a subgroup of cable TV news junkies; 20 percent of environment reporters watched cable TV news every day.

Covering the Environment Beat

The fifty-five environment reporters in the study held a variety of official job titles, from reporter and staff writer to Sunday writer. Only about one-third of the New England environment reporters in the study said they had a job title that identified them as such (see Table 2).

One reason for the varied titles may be that these reporters often have duties that go far beyond covering the environment. This study focused on reporters who in the past year either covered the environment full-time or covered the environment as one of the issues they covered on a regular basis, regardless of the job title specified at each newspaper or television station.

Only two of the fifty-five reporters identified in New England said they covered the environment 100 percent of the time in the preceding twelve months. Only 31 percent said they spent at least 50 percent of their time on the environment. The median percentage of time spent on the environment was 30 percent, leaving 70 percent for other stories. Often the other issues were related to the environment, such as stories on science and health. But many reporters said they would arrive for work to cover that day's breaking stories,

TABLE 2
Exact Job Title of New England Environment Reporters, 2000 (*n* = 55; in percentages)

Reporter, general assignment reporter, staff writer	43.6
Environmental writer, science writer, environmental/science reporter, science editor, science reporter, science/technology reporter, national science writer	32.8
Senior reporter or senior staff writer	7.3
Sunday writer or Sunday reporter	5.5
Health reporter, health and science reporter	3.6
City editor or assistant state editor	3.6
Correspondent	1.8
General assignment writer with Focus section	1.8
Total	100

whatever they might be, and that any environment-oriented stories would be given to them.

The study also included responses from three reporters who said they spent less than 5 percent of their time on environmental stories in the past year; all three had recently begun regular environmental coverage but found that over the course of the past year, they had written relatively few such stories (see Table 3).

Sources of Information Used by New England Environment Reporters

The New England environment reporters said they used a wide variety of sources in covering their beats, from federal, state, and local government officials to academic experts and from business groups to national and local environmental groups. This study explored twenty-nine potential sources that reporters might use. Each was rated for frequency of use, with the highest frequency (*always*) 1.0 and the lowest (*never*) 5.0.

Reporters sometimes scoff at dealing with public information officers, saying they prefer to talk to a top administrator or a scientist for information on an issue. New England's environment reporters had frequent contacts with public information officers (PIOs) and scientists, valuing the time they spent with scientists more than the time they spent with public relations officers. Half of these reporters saw administrators only "sometimes," and yet they valued the time spent with them somewhat more than the time they spent with public relations people. PIOs often serve as messengers and gatekeepers, providing access to other sources such as scientists and officials. New England's

TABLE 3
Percentage of Time (in past year) Spent on Environmental Stories

<i>Percentage of Time</i>	<i>Number of New England Environment Reporters (2000)</i>	<i>Percentage of Reporters</i>
3	2	3.6
4	1	1.8
5	5	9.1
8	2	3.6
9	1	1.8
10	2	3.6
20	7	12.7
23	3	5.5
25	3	5.5
30	3	5.5
33	3	5.5
35	2	3.6
40	2	3.6
43	1	1.8
48	1	1.8
50	4	7.3
60	2	3.6
65	1	1.8
75	1	1.8
80	2	3.6
90	1	1.8
95	4	7.3
100	2	3.6
Total	55	100

NOTE: Question: Looking back on the past year, about what percentage of your time has been spent on reporting environmental stories (however you want to define them)?

environment reporters spent a lot of time with public relations people; 90 percent assigned that time “some” or “fairly high” value (see Table 4).

At the federal level, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) received the highest mean scores for use. Every environment reporter used the EPA and almost everyone used CDC as well. State offices were used even more heavily. Of the seven state offices listed, reporters said they used five of them either often or sometimes. Reporters also used local offices such as the mayor, town council, and local departments of health, but the mean scores of local officials trailed the top state agencies.

Proximity appears to be the key for reporters’ use of environmental organizations as sources. The mean scores for local environmental groups and

TABLE 4
Types of Sources Used in Environmental Stories, by Time Spent
with Sources and Their Value to Reporters (in percentages)

	<i>PIOs</i>	<i>Scientists</i>	<i>Administrators</i>
1. Frequency of contact with various sources			
Never	0	0	0
Rarely	3.7	5.5	0
Sometimes	22.2	29.1	50.9
Often	59.3	60.0	47.3
Always	14.8	5.5	1.8
Total	100	100.1 ^a	100
2. Value placed on time spent with various sources			
No value	0	0	0
Little value	9.3	0	0
Some value	59.3	7.3	38.2
Fairly high value	31.5	38.2	36.4
Very high value	0	54.5	25.5
Total	100.1 ^a	100	100.1 ^a

NOTE: PIOs = public information officers. Questions: OK, now I'd like to know who you talk to when you call these public and private organizations for information on environmental stories. For example, how about *public information officers*? In your environmental reporting, would you say you talk to public information officers. . . ? How about *scientists*. . . ? How about *administrators* of the government agency or private group. . . ? Finally, we want to know whether you value the time you spend with each of these sources. How about public information officers? Would you say the time you spend with them on a story has. . . ? How about scientists. . . ? How about administrators. . . ?

a. Total does not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

individual citizens active in environmental affairs were higher than such nationally known environmental groups as the Sierra Club and Audubon Society. Business organizations tended to have lower scores, while academic officials, professors, and researchers had one of the highest mean scores (2.35) of any source listed (see Table 5).

When an overall ranking of sources by mean score was computed, the dominance of state and local sources became even clearer. Of the ten sources used heavily, as indicated by the highest mean scores, five were state sources, three were local, one was a federal agency, and one represented academic sources. In all, five of the seven state sources of information made the top ten list, along with three of the four local sources, but only one of eight federal sources. The proximity of the state and local sources, as well as their ability to supply specific information that allowed reporters to localize a story, may have contributed to their heavier use.

Conservatives have long complained that environment coverage is tilted in a liberal, pro-environment direction. The fact that the Chemical

TABLE 5
Sources Used by Environment Reporters,
Grouped by Type of Source

	<i>Percentage</i>					<i>Total</i>	<i>Mean</i>
	<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>		
1. Federal							
Environmental Protection Agency	0	41.8	50.9	7.3	0	100	2.66
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	0	18.2	49.1	29.1	3.6	100	3.18
Department of Energy	0	7.3	32.7	49.1	10.9	100	3.64
Food and Drug Administration	0	3.6	30.9	52.7	12.7	99 ^a	3.75
Department of Transportation	1.8	1.8	29.1	52.7	14.5	99 ^a	3.76
National Science Foundation	0	0	30.9	36.4	32.7	100	4.02
National Health & Safety Council	0	0	18.2	47.3	34.5	100	4.16
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry	0	5.5	20.0	25.5	49.1	101 ^a	4.18
2. State							
Department of Environmental Quality	10.9	80.0	9.1	0	0	100	1.98
Department of Natural Resources	10.8	54.1	29.7	2.7	2.7	100	2.32
Department of Health	3.6	56.4	34.5	5.5	0	100	2.42
Legislative offices	3.6	52.7	36.4	5.5	1.8	100	2.49
Governor's office	1.8	40.0	38.2	18.2	1.8	100	2.78
Department of Transportation	1.8	25.5	47.3	21.8	3.6	100	3.00
Department of Food/Agriculture	1.9	20.4	37.0	35.2	5.6	101 ^a	3.22
3. Local							
Mayor/top official	5.5	27.3	43.6	21.8	1.8	100	2.87
City/town council	7.3	23.6	40.0	25.5	3.6	100	2.95
Departments of Health	0	21.6	52.9	17.6	7.8	99 ^a	3.12
County administrators	3.2	6.5	22.6	48.4	19.4	101 ^a	3.74
4. Environmental organizations							
Local environmental groups	3.6	63.6	32.7	0	0	99 ^a	2.29
Individual citizens	5.5	56.4	38.2	0	0	101 ^a	2.33
Audubon Society	1.8	20.0	49.1	20.0	9.1	100	3.15
Sierra Club	0	9.1	45.5	32.7	12.7	100	3.49
Natural Resources Defense Council	0	1.8	38.2	30.9	29.1	100	3.87
Greenpeace	0	1.8	9.1	45.5	43.6	100	4.31

TABLE 5 Continued

	Percentage					Total	Mean
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never		
5. Business							
Manufacturers, developers, local business leaders	1.8	16.4	54.5	21.8	5.5	100	3.13
Chamber of Commerce	1.8	3.6	49.1	30.9	14.5	99 ^a	3.53
Chemical Manufacturers Association	0	0	20.0	41.8	38.2	100	4.18
6. Academic							
Academic officials, professors, researchers	3.6	61.8	30.9	3.6	0	99 ^a	2.35

NOTE: Sources ranked by mean within each category (from *always* = 1.0 to *never* = 5.0). Any responses for the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife were included with the Department of Natural Resources. Chamber of Commerce included both local and national organizations. *n* = 55 except for Department of Natural Resources (*n* = 37), Department of Food and Agriculture (*n* = 54), local departments of health (*n* = 51), and county administrators (*n* = 31).

a. Total does not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Manufacturers Association scored near the bottom in terms of reporter use, the twenty-seventh mean score out of twenty-nine sources, might be used to support such a position. But the organization with the lowest mean score, indicating lowest usage as a source by environment reporters, was Greenpeace, an activist pro-environment group. Lower profile federal agencies like the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, the National Health and Safety Council, and the National Science Foundation also ranked among the least used sources (see Table 6).

The Elements of Environment News

While many New England environment reporters said they spend part of their time covering other issues, they also brought those other issues and other perspectives into their writing about the environment. The reporters were asked about nine factors that might be present in environmental stories, ranging from a political or government angle to a human-interest angle. In all nine cases, the reporters ranked the factors as either "sometimes" existing in their stories or "often" being there (based on the mean scores of their responses to each factor with the highest frequency, *always* = 1.0, and the lowest, *never* = 5.0). The element that received the highest ranking, human interest, was cited as "always" present by 16.4 percent of reporters and

TABLE 6
Sources Used by Environment Reporters,
Ranked by Frequency of Use

	<i>Percentage</i>					<i>Total</i>	<i>Mean</i>
	<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>		
State Department of Environmental Quality	10.9	80.0	9.1	0	0	100	1.98
Local environmental groups	3.6	63.6	32.7	0	0	99 ^a	2.29
Individual citizens	5.5	56.4	38.2	0	0	101 ^a	2.33
Academics, professors, researchers	3.6	61.8	30.9	3.6	0	99 ^a	2.35
State Department of Natural Resources	10.8	54.1	29.7	2.7	2.7	100	2.32
State Department of Health	3.6	56.4	34.5	5.5	0	100	2.42
State legislative offices	3.6	52.7	36.4	5.5	1.8	100	2.49
Environmental Protection Agency	0	41.8	50.9	7.3	0	100	2.66
Governor's office	1.8	40.0	38.2	18.2	1.8	100	2.78
Mayor or top municipal official	5.5	27.3	43.6	21.8	1.8	100	2.87
City/town council offices	7.3	23.6	40.0	25.5	3.6	100	2.95
State Department of Transportation	1.8	25.5	47.3	21.8	3.6	100	3.00
Local departments of health	0	21.6	52.9	17.6	7.8	99 ^a	3.12
Manufacturers, developers, local business	1.8	16.4	54.5	21.8	5.5	100	3.13
Audubon Society	1.8	20.0	49.1	20.0	9.1	100	3.15
Centers of Disease Control and Prevention	0	18.2	49.1	29.1	3.6	100	3.18
State Department of Food/Agriculture	1.9	20.4	37.0	35.2	5.6	101 ^a	3.22
Sierra Club	0	9.1	45.5	32.7	12.7	100	3.49
Chamber of Commerce	1.8	3.6	49.1	30.9	14.5	99 ^a	3.53
Department of Energy	0	7.3	32.7	49.1	10.9	100	3.64
County administrators	3.2	6.5	22.6	48.4	19.4	101 ^a	3.74
Food and Drug Administration	0	3.6	30.9	52.7	12.7	99 ^a	3.75
Department of Transportation	1.8	1.8	29.1	52.7	14.5	99 ^a	3.76
Natural Resources Defense Council	0	1.8	38.2	30.9	29.1	100	3.87
National Science Foundation	0	0	30.9	36.4	32.7	100	4.0
National Health & Safety Council	0	0	18.2	47.3	34.5	100	4.16
Chemical Manufacturers Association	0	0	20.0	41.8	38.2	100	4.18
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry	0	5.5	20.0	25.5	49.1	101 ^a	4.18
Greenpeace	0	1.8	9.1	45.5	43.6	100	4.31

a. Total does not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

TABLE 7
Additional News Elements Included in Environmental Stories

	Percentage					Total	Mean
	<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>		
Human interest angle	16.4	50.9	30.9	1.8	0	100	2.18
Government angle	5.5	67.3	25.5	1.8	0	101 ^a	2.24
Pollution angle	5.5	58.2	34.5	1.8	0	100	2.33
Nature or wilderness angle	1.8	61.8	32.7	3.6	0	99 ^a	2.38
Health angle	3.6	43.6	49.1	3.6	0	99 ^a	2.53
Business or economic angle	3.7	44.4	42.6	9.3	0	100	2.57
Science or technology angle	0	49.1	40.0	10.9	0	100	2.62
Political angle	5.5	36.4	41.8	16.4	0	101 ^a	2.69
Risk assessment angle	0	30.2	41.5	28.3	0	100	2.98

NOTE: Question: 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 . . . (from *always* = 1.0 to *never* = 5.0)?

a. Percentages do not total 100 percent due to rounding.

“often” present by an additional 50.9 percent. Risk assessment, at the bottom of the list, was ranked as rarely present by 28 percent of reporters, yet often included by 30 percent. The findings downplay the notion of environment stories being purely a conservation story or a science story. Instead, environment reporters appear to include overlapping factors in their reporting and writing (see Table 7).

Attitudes toward Environment Stories

New England’s environment journalists, not surprisingly, felt their work was important and worthy of prominent play. They felt their editors and the general public were supportive of the importance of their work but to a lesser degree than the reporters’ own sense of the importance of their stories (see Table 8).

The New England environment reporters also were asked to gauge the public’s interest in other ways. A majority of these environment reporters felt the public was interested in analysis of environmental issues that goes beyond the initial breaking news on an issue. And they rejected any notion that the public has little interest in reading about or viewing problems such as the environment (see Table 9).

TABLE 8
Reporters' Perceptions of Importance of Environmental Stories to Their Editors, Their Readers, and Themselves (in percentages)

	<i>Reporter</i>	<i>Editor</i>	<i>Public</i>
Very important	60.0	12.7	29.6
Important	40.0	65.5	53.7
Neither	0	20.0	16.7
Not very important	0	1.8	0
Not at all important	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100

NOTE: Questions: To what extent [do you] think environmental stories are important and worthy of prominent play? In general, do you see them as . . . ? How about your editors . . . ? How about the public . . . ?

TABLE 9
Reporters' Perceptions of Audience Interest in Environmental News (in percentages)

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Total</i>
Audience prefers breaking news to analysis of environmental issues	0	44.4	51.1	4.4	100
Audience has little interest in environmental stories	0	5.6	64.8	29.6	100

NOTE: Questions: [Readers, viewers] are more interested in the day's breaking news about environmental issues than in analysis of those environmental issues. Do you . . . ? The majority of [readers, viewers] have little interest in [reading about, viewing] problems such as the environment. Do you . . . ?

Barriers to Reporting on Environmental Stories

Gripping about editors is an age-old tradition in journalism. This study tested the hypothesis that editors are a barrier to environment reporting. Reporters were asked about seventeen potential barriers, including editors, time constraints, competition in the local media market, and pressure from advertisers. This study found that everyday, practical journalistic process concerns such as time constraints and the size of the news hole were ranked as the most frequent barriers. In contrast, such factors as university sources of information, a reporter's colleagues, advertisers, and competition in the local media market were seen as posing the lowest barriers to reporting on environmental stories. Editors were ranked in the middle of the pack, posing the eighth biggest barrier out of the seventeen factors examined (see Table 10).

TABLE 10
Potential Barriers to Reporting on the Environment

	Percentage					Total	Mean
	<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>		
Time constraints	11.1	31.5	50.0	1.9	5.6	100	2.59
Size of the news hole	3.6	10.9	54.5	18.2	12.7	99 ^a	3.26
Financial, travel, or other resource constraints	0	22.2	42.6	7.4	27.8	100	3.41
Your lack of technical knowledge on the environment	0	1.9	53.7	20.4	24.1	101 ^a	3.67
Government sources	0	12.7	40.0	12.7	34.5	99 ^a	3.69
Audience's lack of technical knowledge on the environment	0	7.7	40.4	11.5	40.4	100	3.85
Need to give stories a human face	0	5.5	38.2	12.7	43.6	100	3.95
Your editors or supervisors	0	3.6	38.2	12.7	45.5	100	4.00
Legal concerns	0	0	31.5	18.5	50.0	100	4.19
Environmental activists	0	0	31.5	7.4	61.1	100	4.30
Other business or corporate interests	0	1.8	20.0	10.9	67.3	100	4.44
Your publisher, station manager, or owner	0	0	18.2	7.3	74.5	100	4.56
Ethical concerns	0	1.9	11.1	9.3	77.8	101 ^a	4.63
The competition	0	3.7	7.4	1.9	87.0	100	4.72
Advertisers	0	1.9	9.3	3.7	85.2	101 ^a	4.72
Your colleagues	0	0	5.6	14.8	79.6	100	4.74
University sources	0	0	7.3	5.5	87.3	101 ^a	4.80

NOTE: Question: 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. . . ? Factors ranked by mean score, lowest to highest. Index ranged from *always* = 1 to *never* = 5. a. Percentages do not total 100 percent due to rounding.

Autonomy in Story Selection

When journalists were asked which factors they considered in judging jobs in their field, 51 percent of the New England environment reporters in 2000 and 51 percent of the 1992 national sample of reporters in general mentioned the "amount of autonomy." Weaver and Wilhoit (1996, 62-63) spoke in terms of "autonomy's decline" in the time period from 1982-1983 to 1992. Yet, their 1992 respondents felt they had more freedom in getting a story covered (55 percent), story selection (44 percent), and deciding the emphasis of

the story (66 percent) than did the New England environment reporters in 2000. This further decline in reporter autonomy may be partly a period effect. U.S. journalists' perceptions of their autonomy may be continuing to decline over time, but it is also possibly a cohort effect, specific to environment reporters. Only 29 percent of the New England environment reporters thought they had almost complete freedom regarding the emphases of their stories, only 24 percent felt they could almost always get a story covered, and only 22 percent felt they had almost complete freedom in selecting stories.

Friend or Foe: Reporters Feel the Attitudes of Editors Affect Coverage

Eleven of the fifty-five New England environment reporters (20 percent) said they thought their editors considered environmental stories neither important nor not important, and one reporter (1.8 percent) said his or her editors considered environmental stories not very important (see Table 8). How do these twelve environment reporters (21.8 percent of those interviewed) compare with the forty-three reporters whose editors were seen as considering environment reporting important?

Several differences emerged. Reporters with more supportive editors were less likely to say their editors were a barrier to reporting on the environment. But while nine of the twelve reporters viewed their uninterested editors as a barrier, three did not. And sixteen of the reporters with pro-environment editors said their editors were sometimes a barrier to environment reporting.

Reporters with more supportive editors were less likely to say the news hole was a barrier to reporting, suggesting that perhaps they had more success getting their stories into the paper and on television due to the support of their editors. The reporters with supportive editors were more likely to have taken short courses since becoming a journalist. The reporters with supportive editors also were more likely to say the editorial policy of a news organization was important in assessing a job with that organization. Finally, the New England environment reporters with supportive editors were more likely to say their news organizations did a good or outstanding job in enhancing the public's understanding of environmental issues.

How Do Environment Reporters Handle the Issues?

The reporters in the study were divided as to whether environment journalists spend too much time on environmental problems and whether their stories unduly alarm the public. The New England reporters split 49 percent/51 percent on whether an environmental problem is a better news story than an environmental success. A majority of reporters (58 percent) said that

TABLE 11
Handling of Stories on Environmental Problems, Risk

<i>Environment Reporters . . .</i>	<i>Percentage</i>				<i>Total</i>	<i>Mean^a</i>
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>		
See environmental problems as better stories than solutions	5.9	43.1	43.1	7.8	99.9 ^b	3.04
Concentrate too much on problems, pollution versus helping public understand research, issues	1.9	55.8	42.3	0	100	2.83
Have overblown environmental risks, unduly alarming the public	0	25.0	66.7	8.3	100	3.58

NOTE: Question 1: An environmental problem is generally a better news story than an environmental success. Do you . . . ?

Question 2: 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 . . . ?

Question 3: Environmental journalists generally have overblown environmental risks, unduly alarming the public. Do you . . . ?

a. The questions offered four potential responses and no neutral category. Responses of "no opinion" were counted as missing. There were fifty-one valid responses to question 1, fifty-two responses to question 2, and forty-eight to question 3.

b. Does not total 100 percent due to rounding.

environment journalists generally concentrate far too much on problems and pollution, rather than writing stories to help the public understand research or complex issues. But three-quarters of the reporters rejected a suggestion that environment writers generally have overblown environmental risks, unduly alarming the public (see Table 11).

Objectivity versus Advocacy

The New England environment reporters also struggled with the choice of remaining objective in their journalism or aiding the environment. Their responses, at times, appeared contradictory.

More than 98 percent of the reporters agreed they need to be as objective as other journalists. Yet 40.8 percent said reporters sometimes should be advocates for the environment. Every reporter interviewed said environment reporters need to be fair to corporations and environmental activist groups alike. Yet nearly half (46.5 percent) said environment reporters are "too green" and slanted in favor of environmentalism, while only 2.1 percent said

TABLE 12
Objectivity versus Advocacy in Reporting Environmental Stories

<i>Environment Reporters . . .</i>	<i>Percentage</i>				<i>Total</i>	<i>Mean^a</i>
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>		
Need to be as objective as other journalists	70.9	27.3	1.8	0	100	1.3
Sometimes should be advocates for environment	4.1	36.7	42.9	16.3	100	3.3
Need to be fair to corporations	46.3	53.7	0	0	100	1.5
Need to be fair to environmental activist groups	46.3	53.7	0	0	100	1.5
Work with community leaders to solve environmental problems	2.2	28.3	56.5	13.0	100	3.5
Are “too green,” slanted in favor of environmentalism	0	46.5	53.5	0	100	3.1
Are “too brown,” slanted in favor of business and industry	0	2.1	89.6	8.3	100	4.0

a. The questions offered four potential responses and no neutral category. Responses of “no opinion” were counted as missing. There were fifty-five valid responses to question 1, forty-nine responses to question 2, fifty-four to question 3, fifty-four to question 4, forty-six to question 5, forty-three to question 6, and forty-eight to question 7.

NOTE: Question 1: Environmental journalists need to be just as objective as journalists in general. Do you. . . ?

Question 2: Environmental journalists sometimes *should be* advocates for the environment. Do you. . . ?

Question 3: Environmental journalists need to be fair to *sources such as corporations*. Do you. . . ?

Question 4: Environmental journalists need to be fair to *sources such as environmental activist groups*. Do you. . . ?

Question 5: Environmental journalists should *work with community leaders* to help solve environmental problems. Do you. . . ?

Question 6: Environmental journalists tend to be too “green”—meaning slanted in favor of environmentalism. Do you. . . ?

Question 7: Environmental journalists tend to be too “brown”—meaning slanted in favor of business and industry. Do you. . . ?

such reporters were “too brown” and slanted in favor of business and industry. By a 2:1 margin, the reporters rejected the idea that they should work with community leaders to solve environmental problems.

These questions appeared to be uncomfortable to some respondents. Twelve of the fifty-five reporters declined to answer the question on whether environment reporters were “too green,” one of the highest nonresponse rates in the survey (see Table 12).

Discussion

The environment reporters of New England in March, April, May, and June 2000 felt their work was important and worthy of prominent play. They felt their editors and the general public were supportive of their work but to a lesser degree than the reporters' own sense of the importance of their stories.

A little more than one year after this survey (on 1 July 2001), a Sunday *New York Times* editorial titled "Mr. Bush's Miscalculation" (2001, 12) discussed the public's interest in the environment:

For more than three decades, Americans have demonstrated a commitment to environmental values that transcends party and ideology. History shows that politicians who threaten these values usually pay a stiff political price, as Newt Gingrich and the Contract With America Republicans learned when they tried to rewrite the country's basic clean air and clean water laws in 1995. President Bush is now paying such a price for ignoring this history and underestimating the importance of environmental issues, especially for millions of his natural constituents.

One change brought on by the Bush administration's early environmental pronouncements may be increased and more prominent journalistic attention to environmental issues, as evidenced by the editorial response of the *Times* and other newspapers and as discussed by Bud Ward, the executive director of the National Safety Council's Environmental Health Center, in a cover story called "The Environment Beat Bounces Back" in *SEJournal*, a publication of the Society of Environmental Journalists. Ward interviewed environment reporters at the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, who generally agreed that "California's electricity blackouts and the Bush Administration's controversial ventures into environmental policy are providing environmental coverage something of a bounce at the nation's leading national newspapers" (Ward 2001, 1).

Ward (2001) argued that "even the casual reader should have noticed recently more front-page coverage of issues ranging from carbon dioxide and rejection of the Kyoto Protocol to drinking water standards for arsenic and oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge." He said, "The increased coverage is especially striking for those who grew concerned last year when the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* allowed the beat to go unattended for a time" (p. 1).

Ward (2001, 12) was referring to the decision by the *Washington Post* to move Capitol Hill reporter Eric Pianin to environmental coverage "after going nearly two years without a full-time daily beat reporter." He quoted a

Post internal memo at the time as saying, "There are few subjects right now of more immense importance to readers, and with the beginning of a new Administration, the tug of war between the environmental and energy policy issues promises to be a lively one."

Likewise, the Washington, D.C., bureau of the *Los Angeles Times* put former Capitol Hill reporter Elizabeth Shogren on the environment beat. She told Ward that the bureau had previously treated the environment as "kind of an occasional beat" but that now top management in Los Angeles "think this is a really important beat" (Ward 2001).

At the Washington, D.C., bureau of the *New York Times*, said environment reporter Douglas Jehl, "Editors used to want one story, but now they're voracious for many, many more" (Ward 2001, 1, 12).

Ward (2001, 12) acknowledged, "None of the reporters interviewed for this article argued that environmental stories are a quick ticket to Page One, the way some said that health and science stories are." And a Washington, D.C.-based television network correspondent told him (anonymously), "There's very little appetite, even though there are major issues on the burner right now. Weekends, yes, but weeknights, no" (p. 13).

Did local environment reporters across the country feel they were getting more support for their work from their editors and the general public in 2001 than the New England environment journalists reported in 2000? It will be interesting to compare the responses of the environment reporters of the Mountain West states collected by this study in 2001 with the responses of the New England reporters in 2000. And how will environmental reporting be affected by the events of 11 September 2001? The study of the environmental reporters of the South, conducted in 2002, may very well reflect a changed world. If the Mountain West responses and the Southern responses differ from those of the New England reporters or from each other, it may be difficult to determine if those differences are due to regional effects or to changes in history over only two one-year time spans. But if their responses are similar, they may begin to show a pattern irrespective of time or place.

The current study is a slice of time in a particular region. In winter and spring 2000, the environment reporters of New England ranked everyday, practical journalistic process concerns such as time constraints and the size of the news hole as the most frequent barriers to reporting on the environment. Financial concerns were ranked third, then lack of technical knowledge, government sources, the audience's lack of technical knowledge, and the need to give stories a human face. Editors were ranked as the eighth biggest barrier, with 3.6 percent of the reporters saying their editors were often a barrier and 38.2 percent saying they were sometimes a barrier.

Twenty percent of the New England environment reporters said they thought their editors considered environmental stories neither important nor not important, and one reporter said his or her editors considered environmental stories not very important. Three-quarters of these reporters considered their editors a barrier to environmental reporting, while 37 percent of the reporters with pro-environment editors said their editors were sometimes a barrier.

The New England environment reporters felt they had much less autonomy in 2000 than Weaver and Wilhoit's (1996) national sample of journalists in 1992. Only 29 percent of the New England environment reporters thought they had almost complete freedom regarding the emphases of their stories, only 24 percent felt they could almost always get a story covered, and only 22 percent felt they had almost complete freedom in selecting stories. It will be interesting to discover whether the environment reporters of the Mountain West felt they had more autonomy in 2001 and whether the Southern reporters had less autonomy in the post-September 11 era of 2002.

The New England environment reporters were older, on average, than the journalists in the earlier Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) study. Forty percent of the environment reporters had been journalists for twenty or more years. Many of them were already experienced reporters when they came to the beat.

The New England environment reporters in 2000 were very well educated, with 30.9 percent holding graduate degrees, compared to 11 percent in the national sample of journalists in 1992. But they were not very well paid, with nearly 40 percent earning less than \$35,000 a year and only 13 percent earning more than \$60,000.

Most were fairly satisfied or even very satisfied with their work, and only 15 percent were somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (compared to 23 percent in the earlier national sample of journalists). The top five things that mattered to them in evaluating a job were the editorial policies of their news organizations, the amount of autonomy they were given, the chance to develop a specialty, the chance to help people, and the chance to influence public affairs. Job security was important to only 18 percent of the environment reporters, compared to 61 percent of the national sample, and their pay was the least important factor.

Nearly two-thirds of the New England environment reporters said they were Independents, and most of the remainder called themselves Democrats. But many of the Independents said they leaned toward Democrat, while only one Independent leaned Republican, raising the total number of Republican and Republican-leaning environment reporters in New England to four (of the fifty-five reporters interviewed).

The *New York Times* topped the reading lists of both the environment reporters and the earlier national sample of journalists, but two-thirds of the New England environment reporters read the *Times* compared to one-quarter of the journalists in general. The *Boston Globe* was popular among the New Englanders, and the *Wall Street Journal* was high on both lists. The earlier sample of U.S. journalists paid more attention to *USA Today* and the *Washington Post* than the New Englanders. The environment reporters were more likely to read magazines associated with nature than the national sample, while the U.S. journalists read the national newsmagazines more often. A majority of the environment reporters paid very little attention to network or cable television news, although many of those who did pay attention to television news could be classified as cable TV news junkies.

Only four of the environment reporters in this study were employed by New England's thirty-three television stations with news operations, pointing to the emergence of two hypotheses for future study: that most television stations with news operations do not employ an environment reporter and that most television news directors either do not see the need for such a specialist or feel they cannot afford one.

Half of the daily newspapers in New England employed one or more environment reporters in spring 2000. All but four of the newspapers with circulations above 30,000 employed an environment reporter, suggesting that the employment of specialized reporters may be related to newspaper size and may be dependent on circulation and/or budget. But individual states also reflected a difference, with Maine and Connecticut at the top of the list (in terms of the percentage of papers employing environment reporters), New Hampshire and Vermont in the middle, and Massachusetts and Rhode Island at the bottom.

In New England, the environment is rarely a full-time beat. Only two of the fifty-five reporters in the study said they covered the environment 100 percent of the time. Only 31 percent said they spent at least 50 percent of their time on the environment. The median percentage of time spent on the environment was 30 percent, leaving 70 percent for other stories. Often the other issues were related to the environment, such as stories on science and health. But many reporters said 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.

The most common job title among these reporters was reporter, general assignment reporter, or staff writer. Only about a third of the reporters in the study said they had a job title that identified them as either an environment or science writer or reporter.

While many New England environment reporters said they spent part of their time covering other issues, they also brought those other issues and other perspectives into their writing about the environment. A majority said their stories often (or always) involved a human-interest angle, a government angle, a pollution angle, and a nature angle, and nearly half said their stories often (or always) involved a health angle, a business or economic angle, and a science or technology angle. More than 40 percent said their stories often (or always) included a political angle, and while 30 percent said their stories often involved risk assessment, 28 percent said risk was rarely included in a story. The results downplay the notion of environment stories as purely a conservation story or a science story. Instead, environment reporters appear to include overlapping factors in their reporting and writing.

Their sources, on the other hand, most often come from government. Seven out of the ten news sources most frequently used by New England's environment reporters were government officials or agencies. Nine of the top ten were state or local sources, the exception being the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, a federal agency with regional offices.

Environment reporters are sometimes accused of concentrating on problems, rather than solutions; of blowing environmental risks out of proportion, unduly alarming the public; and of being environmental advocates or "too green." The reporters in the study were divided as to whether environmental journalists generally concentrate far too much on problems while rejecting the suggestion that environment writers generally have overblown environmental risks or unduly alarmed the public. Nearly half said environment reporters tend to be too green or slanted in favor of environmentalism.

Many of the New England environment reporters appeared to be struggling with the choice of remaining objective in their journalism or aiding the environment. While more than 98 percent of the reporters agreed they need to be as objective as other journalists, 40.8 percent said reporters sometimes should be advocates for the environment, and 30.5 percent said they should work with community leaders to solve environmental problems. Is there such a thing as objective advocacy?

As this national environmental journalism study continues, the authors hope to find more insight into those reporters working on this specialty beat and to develop a scientific baseline from which future research may emerge.

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DAVID B. SACHSMAN holds the George R. West, Jr. Chair of Excellence in Communication and Public Affairs and is a professor of communication at the University of

Tennessee at Chattanooga. Previously, he served as principal investigator (with Peter M. Sandman and Michael R. Greenberg) of the Environmental Risk Reporting Project and the Risk Communication Project at Rutgers University and the University of Medicine & Dentistry–Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

JAMES SIMON is director of the journalism program at Fairfield University, Fairfield, Connecticut. He worked for ten years as a political and environment reporter for The Associated Press. He also served three years as assistant secretary of the environment for Massachusetts and as an environmental adviser to the 1988 Dukakis for President campaign.

JoANN MYER VALENTI is a professor of communications at Brigham Young University in Utah and a member of the Science Communication editorial advisory board. She is a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, past board member for the Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ), and currently serves on the editorial boards of SEJournal and the Journal of Public Relations Research. Her chapter on media coverage of sustainability is included in UNESCO's inaugural edition of the Encyclopedia of Life Support to be released during the World Summit (Rio+10) in Johannesburg, South Africa, in fall 2002.