

Committee of Judges

Joan Konner, Chair
Dean Emerita and Professor,
Columbia University Graduate
School of Journalism

Steve Curwood
Host/Executive Producer,
Living On Earth,
National Public Radio

Peter Dykstra
Executive Producer,
CNN Science, Technology,
and Environment

Francis W. Hatch, Jr.
Chairman,
The John Merck Fund

Denis Hayes
President,
The Bullitt Foundation

Jonathan Z. Larsen
Editor (retired),
New Times and
The Village Voice

Anthony Lewis
Columnist (retired),
The New York Times

Jane Lubchenco
Wayne and Gladys Valley
Professor of Marine Biology
and Distinguished Professor of
Zoology, Oregon State
University

John G. H. Oakes
Publisher,
Four Walls Eight Windows

Gerard Piel
Chairman Emeritus,
Scientific American, Inc.

Edward O. Wilson
Professor Emeritus,
Dept. of Organismic and
Evolutionary Biology,
Harvard University

Kathrin Day Lassila
Administrator

Press Release

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2002 OAKES AWARD FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM GOES TO *MOBILE REGISTER* FOR SERIES ON MERCURY IN FISH

Oakes Award Committee of Judges Releases Its List of Top Environmental Stories in Print, 2001–2002

NEW YORK – The ninth annual John B. Oakes Award for Distinguished Environmental Journalism, and its \$5,000 prize, will be awarded to Ben Raines of the *Mobile Register* for an extended series on methylmercury contamination in the nation's seafood supply. The judges evaluated installments of the series that ran from November 2001 through August 2002 (during the award's eligibility period). The first article in the series appeared in July 2001, and the investigation continues today.

"Ben Raines exposed the fact that federal and state government had failed to test the fish or warn the public," said Joan Konner, chair of the Oakes Award Committee of Judges. "The *Register* itself paid for tests that showed 'safe' fish were actually highly contaminated and regular seafood eaters had dangerous levels of mercury in their bodies." Although the series focuses on mercury in seafood caught in the Gulf of Mexico, including swordfish, tuna, black grouper, and many other species, fish from the gulf are sold all over the country. Moreover, mercury contamination is a problem throughout U.S. coastal waters. The series shed new light on the sources of the contamination, especially offshore oil and gas rigs—which, like coal-fired power plants, another major source, are widespread.

The committee of judges awarded second place to Gary Gerhardt, Todd Hartman, and Lou Kilzer of the *Rocky Mountain News* for "Killer in the Herds," a June 2002 series on the spread of chronic wasting disease in elk herds and the ranching practices that may have helped to promote it. There is no monetary prize awarded for second place.

For the first time this year, the Oakes Award Committee of Judges also released its list of the top environmental stories published in 2001–2002. (The Oakes Award eligibility period is October 1 through September 30.) The complete list is as follows:

Winner of the 2002 John B. Oakes Award for Distinguished Environmental Journalism:

- Ben Raines, *Mobile Register* series on mercury contamination in seafood, November 2001 through August 2002
<http://www.al.com/specialreport/?mobileregister/mercuryinthewater.html>

Second place:

- Gary Gerhardt, Todd Hartman, and Lou Kilzer, "Killer in the Herds," *Rocky Mountain News*, June 2002
<http://cfapp.rockymountainnews.com/cwd/killer/>

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Other top stories (in alphabetical order by publication):

- Hal Clifford, "Wyoming's Powder Keg," *High Country News*, November 5, 2001
http://www.hcn.org/servlets/hcn.Article?article_id=10823
- Carl Prine, "Potential for Disaster," *Pittsburgh Tribune Review*, two-part series published in April 2002
http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/tribune-review/specialreports/potentialfordisaster/s_64612.html
- Craig Pittman, "Florida's Great Northwest, Brought to You by the St. Joe Co.," *St. Petersburg Times*, April 21, 2002
http://www.stpetersburgtimes.com/2002/04/21/State/Florida_s_Great_North.shtml
- Kitta MacPherson, "Seeds of Discord," *The (Newark) Star-Ledger*, four-part series published in January 2002
<http://www.nj.com/specialprojects/index.ssf?/specialprojects/rice/main.html>
- Jim Carlton, "Pacific Crossing," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 4, 2002

The John B. Oakes Award for Distinguished Environmental Journalism was created and endowed in 1993 by friends and colleagues of John Oakes, former editorial page editor at *The New York Times* and creator of the contemporary op-ed page.

The Oakes Award Committee of Judges comprises **Joan Konner** (chair), dean emerita and professor, Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism; **Steve Curwood**, host/executive producer, *Living On Earth*, National Public Radio; **Peter Dykstra**, executive producer, CNN Science, Technology, and Environment; **Francis W. Hatch**, chairman of the John Merck Fund; **Denis Hayes**, president of the Bullitt Foundation; **Anthony Lewis**, former *New York Times* columnist; **Jane Lubchenco**, Wayne and Gladys Valley Professor of Marine Biology and Distinguished Professor of Zoology, Oregon State University; **Jonathan Z. Larsen**, former editor of *The Village Voice* and *New Times*; **Gerard Piel**, founder of *Scientific American*; and **Edward O. Wilson**, professor emeritus, Department of Organic and Evolutionary Biology, Harvard University.

The Oakes Award prize and expenses are paid by the Oakes Fund for Environmental Journalism. *OnEarth* magazine, an independent environmental magazine published by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), administers the award. NRDC houses the Oakes Award to help promote the highest standards of excellence in environmental journalism. The award and the judging are kept separate from NRDC's advocacy goals, and no NRDC staff participate in the judging.

Previous Oakes Award winners:

- 2001: "The Mining of the West: Profit and Pollution on Public Lands," a four-part series by Robert McClure and Andrew Schneider about the history of hard-rock mining and mining law in the West, published by the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.
- 2000: "Unwelcome Neighbors: How the Poor Bear the Burdens of America's Pollution," a four-part series on environmental justice by John McQuaid of *The Times-Picayune* of New Orleans.
- 1999: "The Santa Monica Mountains: A Growth Plan Run Amok," a special report by T. Christian Miller about Santa Monica's approval of more development and growth than was originally called for in the area's general growth plan, published by *The Los Angeles Times*.
- 1998: "Trading Away the West," a six-part series by Deborah Nelson, Jim Simon, Eric Nalder, and Danny Westneat on public land trades that sacrifice trees, land, and money, published by *The Seattle Times*.
- 1997: "Fear in the Fields," by Duff Wilson, a special report on the practice of

The John B. Oakes Award

FOR DISTINGUISHED ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM

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turning contaminated industrial waste into fertilizer, published by *The Seattle Times*.

- 1996: "Open for Business," by Dunstan McNichol and Kelly Richmond, a 13-part investigation of the New Jersey governor's deregulatory and pro-business programs, published by *The Record*. The series later won an international environmental reporting award from the National Press Club.
- 1995: "Boss Hog," by Pat Stith and Joby Warrick, a multi-part series on factory hog farming in North Carolina, published by *The News & Observer*. "Boss Hog" later won the Pulitzer Prize for public service reporting.
- 1994: "Vanishing Colorado," by Joseph Verrengia, an eight-part series on the decline of the state's biological diversity, published by the *Rocky Mountain News*.

The prize for the 2002 Oakes Award will be presented to Ben Raines at a reception in New York City in January 2003.

The eligibility period for the 2003 Oakes Award is October 1, 2002, through September 30, 2003. The deadline for receipt of entries is October 6, 2003. More information about the Oakes Award can be found at <http://www.oakesaward.org>.

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