

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),
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, Thunder's Mouth
Press/Nation Books

Cassie King
Administrator

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 1, 2005

Contacts:
Cassie King
Administrator, Oakes Award
(212) 727-4412

Paul Koberstein
Editor/Publisher
Cascadia Times
(503) 223-9036

2004 OAKES AWARD FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM GOES TO PAUL KOBERSTEIN OF THE *CASCADIA TIMES*

The paper's special issue "Plundering The Pacific" uncovers flagrant
conflicts of interest among regulators of U.S. fisheries

Oakes Award Committee of Judges releases its list of top environmental stories in print, 2003-2004

NEW YORK —The eleventh annual John B. Oakes Award for Distinguished Environmental Journalism and its \$5,000 prize will be awarded to Paul Koberstein, editor and publisher of the *Cascadia Times* of Portland, Oregon, and the author of the newspaper's special issue "Plundering the Pacific." Koberstein examines the federally appointed committees that oversee U.S. fisheries and finds them rife with conflicts of interest. These councils' shoddy management of marine resources, Koberstein writes, has a direct and damaging effect on the very seas they were established to protect.

Koberstein focuses on the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, better known as Wespac. In 1976, Congress gave Wespac responsibility over fishing in 1.5 million square miles of U.S. waters in the western Pacific-half of all the ocean waters under federal jurisdiction. Wespac promulgated rules for longliners (who fasten baits to lines that can extend 60 miles) so lax that some 1,500 endangered leatherback sea turtles were trapped and killed each year throughout the 1990s. This represents the most rapid decline of a large vertebrate population in history, according to a leading sea turtle biologist. A handful of fishermen run the Wespac show, Koberstein reports. Two men who have held sway on the council for years not only were longliners but also sell longline equipment commercially-as well as the bait, the gear, and the ice to go with it. As council members, they profited from the very rules they helped put into place, and on occasion violated those same rules. Wespac also fought a congressional ban on cutting the fins off sharks and dumping the live sharks back into the water. And Koberstein describes a campaign led by Wespac to dismantle the 84-million-acre Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve, located in one of the

most remote archipelagos on earth and of special cultural importance to Native Hawaiians. This area includes the vast majority of coral reefs in U.S. waters, as well as the highly endangered Hawaiian monk seal. But the problem is not just with Wespac, as Koberstein points out. "None of the 38 seats on the 3 Pacific Ocean councils represents conservation interests," he writes According to one of Koberstein's sources, "Congress set the system up for plundering."

"The Oakes judges applaud the craft and commitment that make this work of independent, investigative journalism stand out in a field of outstanding contenders," said Joan Konner, chair of the Oakes Award Committee of Judges and professor and dean emerita of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. "It is an example of how a small, underfunded, independent publication can make a difference, especially at this time of destructive political incursions into the rules and regulations that protect natural resources and the environment."

"Plundering the Pacific" appeared in the Fall 2003 issue of the *Cascadia Times*.
www.times.org (*Cascadia Times* website)

The Oakes Award Committee of Judges gave honorable mention to the following environmental stories published in 2003-2004
(alphabetized by publication name):

Jeff Claassen, Scott Streater, Seth Borenstein of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* for their July 2004 series "Is the EPA Doing Enough?"

Elizabeth Shogren of the *Los Angeles Times* for her story "Builders Swamp Wetlands," published October 19, 2003.

Bruce Barcott for his *New York Times Magazine* story "Changing All The Rules," published April 4, 2004.

Tim Collie and Mike Stocker of the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, for their story "Haiti: The Eroding Nation," published on Dec. 7, 2003.

The prize for the 2004 Oakes Award will be presented at a reception in New York City on February 10, 2005.

More information about the Oakes Award can be found at www.oakesaward.org.

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, Jr.**, 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*; and **John G. H. Oakes**, publisher of Thunder's Mouth Press, co-publisher of Nation Books, and vice president of the Avalon Publishing Group.

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.

###