

SPECIAL REPORT:

The Nonprofit Path Ahead

**Analysis: Can Nonprofit News Save
Environment Reporting?**

**Inside Story: Q&A with Nonprofit
Innovator**

**Freelance Files: Inner Workings of a
Digital Startup**

Also
Look-ahead at Environmental
Politics in 2015

SEJ Faces Diversity Challenges

Reporter's Toolbox:
Bring Climate Data to Life

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A quarterly publication of the

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To strengthen the quality, reach and viability of journalism across all media to advance public understanding of environmental issues

The Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) is a non-profit, tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) organization. The mission of SEJ is to strengthen the quality, reach and viability of journalism across all media to advance public understanding of environmental issues. As a network of journalists and academics, SEJ offers national and regional conferences, publications and online services. SEJ's membership of more than 1,200 includes journalists working for print and electronic media, educators, and students. Non-members are welcome to attend SEJ's annual conferences and to subscribe to the quarterly *SEJournal*.

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The Central Arizona Project canal transports water from the Colorado River to Phoenix and Tucson, one of many subjects explored in depth by Circle of Blue, a 14-year-old online news organization, honored by the SEJ awards last year, that focuses on water and its relationship to food, energy, and health. To delve deeper, see story on page 14.







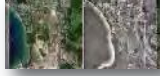

Photo: © J. Carl Ganter, Circle of Blue



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Old-School Reporting in a New-Style Package

Nonprofit 'Pro-Water' Site Brings Ground Journalism, Striking Visuals to Bear on Complex Global Stories

As part of SEJournal's look at the future of nonprofit news services, our "Inside Story" editor Beth Daley spoke with J. Carl Ganter, director of Circle of Blue, a team of journalists and researchers headquartered in Michigan that reports on the global intersection of water, food and energy. The nonprofit recently won two recognitions in SEJ's 13th annual awards — a second-place award for Ganter, Matt Black and Brian Lehmann's evocative, intimate images of the world's quest for water, and a third-place prize for reporter Brett Walton's timely, clear writing on competing interests for water in three Western states. Ganter, whose photography and reporting has appeared across media including TIME, National Geographic, Rolling Stone, NBC5 and public radio, co-founded the news group in 2000. He's a Northwestern graduate and was part of a team that broke the first story in the series of wrongful conviction cases investigated by Medill students. He also taught multimedia bootcamps for eight years at the Poynter Institute. Since then, he has received the Rockefeller Foundation's Centennial Innovation Award in 2012 and is a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Water.

SEJournal: When did Circle of Blue launch and why?

J. Carl Ganter: When our daughter was born 14 years ago, my wife, Eileen, and I wondered what the world would be like for her generation. We asked ourselves what would be the big story of her lifetime, what could we do to help inform some of the most important decisions of her time. Our first grant came from the Ford Foundation in 2006 to do a multimedia project in Mexico. We wanted to show how one community, Tehuacan, was a crucible for the fast-emerging global water crisis. We brought in World Press-winning photojournalist Brent Stirton and *Newsweek* cover writer Joe Contreras. We peeled back the layers of an intensely complicated issue and the results were published by nearly every major Mexico news outlet. We proved our capabilities to cover tough stories — in-depth, and fast.

SEJournal: From where does your funding come?

Ganter: Circle of Blue is an independent, nonprofit affiliate of the Pacific Institute, a California-based think tank on climate and water. Our funders include the Rockefeller Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Energy Foundation, and the Charles Steward Mott Foundation.

SEJournal: Describe Circle of Blue's mission and goals.

Ganter: Our core coverage is water and the competition between water, food and energy. These are the planet's big stories, and they are fiercely complicated. They aren't just a click away. We believe in old-school reporting, which we call, "IWT," or, I Was There. You have to go to the mines of Inner Mongolia or the fields of Punjab to dig out the stories, capture the data, and show the context. Then we physically convene around our findings. For example, in China we sent four teams across the country and found that the country doesn't have enough water to continue mining and processing coal. This is likely the largest threat to its GDP. We partnered with the Wilson Center, a nonpartisan think tank and convening center

in Washington, for research and presentations. Together, we did 17 sessions across China, from presentations for the China Minister of Water to the U.S. Embassy to the Yellow River Commission.

SEJournal: How many staff members do you have, i.e., how many editors, reporters, etc.?

Ganter: We have a core team of eight people and ramp up for major projects. For example, we had about 40 working on the Choke Point: China project. This included photojournalists, reporters, editors, designers, interns from Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism, and graduate students in design at Ball State University.

SEJournal: How do you keep your reputation as an objective, unbiased organization?

Ganter: We avoid the term "advocacy journalism," but of course, I'm pro-water. It's imperative for us to maintain and protect our trust, credibility and objectivity. Our reporting is crisp, we ask tough questions, and we do what good journalism is designed to do: reveal new ideas, present unbiased accounts, and compel in-



Circle of Blue, as part of an investigation of the extensive manmade river that will move water from central China to Beijing, captured views of the massive infrastructure of the South North Water Transfer Project, like this aqueduct under the Yellow River.

Photo: © Aaron Jaffe, Circle of Blue



Pollution is a major driver of water scarcity in China, especially in the places where economic growth is the highest and water resources are under the most stress, such as this canal in Beijing, photographed as part of a series called "Choke Point: China." Photo: © J. Carl Ganter, Circle of Blue

formed response.

SEJournal: When is a nonprofit journalism venture such as Circle of Blue able to call itself sustainable?

Ganter: I would bet that most nonprofit journalism organizations face a continual sustainability challenge. It's hard to build an endowment, and it's difficult to be cumulative with the way most foundations operate. The big questions that worry me are: Can philanthropy keep up? Can nonprofit funders support the work necessary to inform our generation's most urgent, important decisions? Will foundations and philanthropists continue to value great (and often costly) reporting when the world is filled with clutter and shallow streams of dubious information? Funding has to be systemic and as persistent as the challenges.

For our big take-outs, we assemble several funders, and in parallel raise support for daily reporting and operations. Funders need to understand these issues are complicated, they are not a click away, you have to be persistent, and you have to be on the ground to do the real work. Considering the gravity of the global situation, it's important to stay focused and not go down rabbit holes of meaningless stories. Aggregation, Twitter streams, stock photos, and crowdsourcing alone don't provide an accurate picture. In some cases, we've accepted funding from companies, but are very careful to maintain independence.

SEJournal: What can nonprofit journalism accomplish that traditional journalism cannot?

Ganter: For us, we've been able to be laser-focused on what we feel is the biggest ongoing story of our careers. We were first to report China's serious coal-water issues, and our work consistently leads and drives other media coverage. In the nonprofit world, we

have to be more innovative and selective about what we cover. We also have the flexibility of being more mission-driven where we might not be able to generate advertising revenue around such critical issues. Our audiences may not be huge, but I'm most interested in who's clicking rather than how many people are clicking on our work.

SEJournal: Should we be striving to promote nonprofit journalism when for-profit still provides so much content? Why?

Ganter: Journalism — without fear or favor — is critical for democracy to survive. Many of the for-profit outlets more and more are driven by ratings and pageviews, and they don't have the expertise, tenacity or airtime to take on these persistent problems. We live in one of the most disruptive periods in history and face massive challenges. Journalism is one of the few tools that can shift a dangerous course by providing transparency, holding truth to power, and creating empathy and understanding. We need dedicated journalists across all spectrums and funding models.

SEJournal: Your website is notable for its striking visuals. How carefully do you conceive stories around or with photography, multimedia and infographics?

Ganter: I started hanging out at *TIME* Magazine and Contact Press Images when I was 16. Growing up around the world's best photojournalists, I learned that the power of a single image can change the world. For our bigger projects, whether in India, California or China, we assign top photojournalists to capture the life-moments behind the stories, from a shepherd family that lives in the shadow of coal fields in Inner Mongolia to the Central Valley in California. And we live in an age where data can be beautifully presented and interactive.

Continued on page 18



Extensive reporting on the dwindling underground water supply in the United States yielded images of center pivot irrigation systems like this one near Edson, KS, which have drawn up more water from the eight-state Ogallala Aquifer than flows down the Colorado River. The nonprofit newsroom found that the \$30 billion agriculture and livestock industry that produces one-fifth of the nation's corn, wheat, and cattle faces a new era of reckoning as it moves toward decisions on water use, crop yields, and profits that have been put off for decades.

Photo: © Brian Lehmann, Circle of Blue



Water spurts from a fresh well near Sublette, KS, that was drilled by a contractor working around the clock to punch new holes in the Ogallala Aquifer. Circle of Blue reported that the Ogallala, the primary water source in the Great Plains, is declining as billions of gallons are pumped out each year to irrigate corn, sorghum, soybeans and wheat.

Photo: © Brian Lehmann, Circle of Blue

SEJournal: How do you choose what to cover?

Ganter: We listen hard for emerging trends. We cover news every day and try to connect the dots. We think systemically and are intensely curious — if a story is emerging in China, we wonder how it will affect mining investments in Australia. We also use our own Twitter feed to curate headlines and what we think is important. Last summer we published Choke Point: Index, an in-depth look at the U.S. water and agriculture challenges. These stories came from on-the-ground reporting and listening hard for the most important angles.

SEJournal: What would you consider the most underreported water stories journalists are not pursuing?

Ganter: Water affects everything and it's easy to drown in information and miss the connections. You have to pick a place to start reporting and apply the rules of solid journalism — make it personal, ask the usual questions about heroes, victims and villains, and follow the money. For a global story, water is also the most local. If you are a local reporter or a beat reporter and want to cover water, learn about local pollution issues, Superfund sites, ground water use and quality, and infrastructure investments. There are inspiring features to be written and hard-hitting investigations.

SEJournal: What advice would you give reporters to pursue these stories?

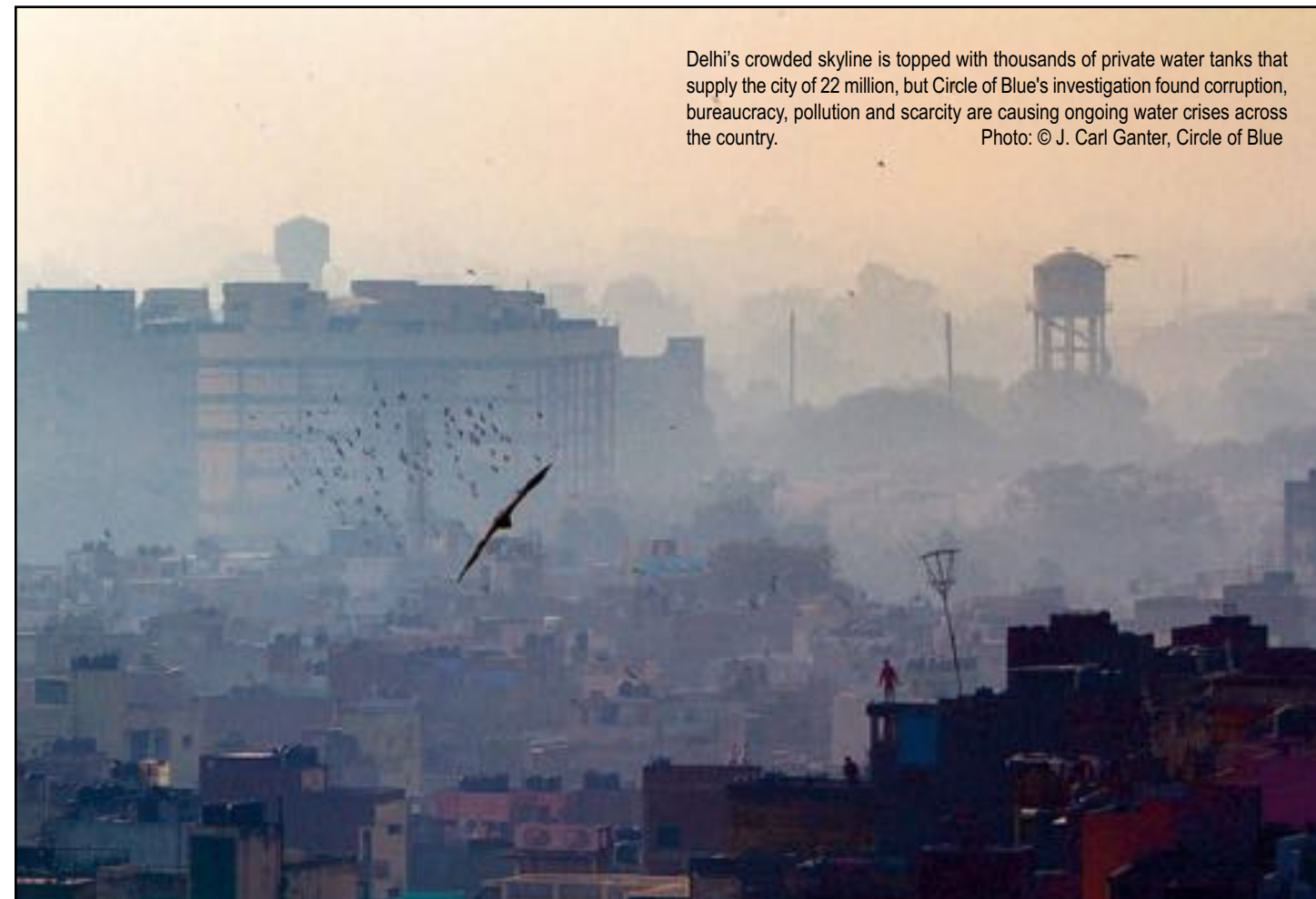
Ganter: Water — or any of these big resource issues — can't be reported in a single story. These issues are ongoing and require persistence, tenacity, and creativity. It's disappointing to see that the typical environmental beat has faded from most traditional news



In a report on the largest rice and wheat producers in India, Circle of Blue focused on Punjabi farmers whose use of free water and energy is causing food waste and power shortages in India. Photo: © J. Carl Ganter, Circle of Blue

outlets. It takes collective knowledge and experience to make the big stories of our time — water, climate, energy, agriculture — relevant, personal and valuable.

"Inside Story" editor Beth Daley is reporter and director of partnerships at the New England Center for Investigative Reporting, a nonprofit newsroom based at Boston University and affiliated with WGBH News.



Delhi's crowded skyline is topped with thousands of private water tanks that supply the city of 22 million, but Circle of Blue's investigation found corruption, bureaucracy, pollution and scarcity are causing ongoing water crises across the country. Photo: © J. Carl Ganter, Circle of Blue

SEJ Struggles to Achieve Long-Standing Diversity Aims Upcoming Oklahoma Conference an Opportunity to Reflect Native Presence

By Talli Nauman

When a documentary crew came to the Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Nation in New Town, ND, last fall to report on fracking's impact at the center of the booming Bakken oil patch, one interviewee was bitterly disappointed.

Jodi Lee Spotted Bear, the executive director of the tribal government's newspaper and radio station, complained that the crew, while multi-ethnic in makeup, "didn't know a damn thing about Indian country." Added Spotted Bear: "It's so important to get people in there who know what they're doing. ... You need to do your homework."

For Spotted Bear, and those in the ranks of the Society of Environmental Journalists, diversity in environmental reporting has long been a concern. Over the organization's 25-year history, its staff continually has asserted a two-pronged approach to inclusive coverage on the beat: fostering increased involvement of journalists from diverse communities, while improving the performance quality of media work in these communities.

"The demand for addressing diversity and practicing more inclusive journalism has been glaring," notes SEJ's 2013 Guide to Diversity in Environmental Reporting (<http://bit.ly/SEJ-diversity>). "The need is longstanding for greater participation by and coverage of the perspectives of women, racial and ethnic groups, age groups, and people of various orientations, abilities and geographies."

The organization hopes the diversity concern will have its day in the sun at the upcoming annual conference Oct. 7-11, 2015, in Norman, OK.

Conference Co-Chairs Sarah Terry-Cobo and Nancy Gaarder agree that the event should reflect a clear "sense of place" in a state where 39 tribal governments contribute more than \$10.8 billion to the economy and the standard vehicle license plate is emblazoned with "Native America."

Key players from the Native American community at the conference host University of Oklahoma and from the state and federal government "have invested time and thought in guaranteeing that our tours incorporate Native American concerns," Gaarder added. "They had done a tremendous amount of work before we even arrived for the site visit."

As a result, most of the 10 planned conference tours air Native American viewpoints on matters such as food security, land and

water rights, water quantity and quality, she said. Native Americans Vicki Monks, Lenzy Krehbiel-Burton and Rebecca Lansberry are among organizers of tour groups.



Jodi Lee Spotted Bear, executive director of the Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Nation's newspaper and radio station in New Town, ND.

Photo: courtesy Jodi Lee Spotted Bear

Lansberry, the membership and communications manager at the Norman-based Native American Journalists Association, or NAJA, has been working with SEJ Annual Conference Director Jay Letto and Membership Chair Kate Sheppard on outreach to involve her organization's constituents.

Goal to have diversity 'part of every discussion'

While the conference effort builds on previous SEJ members' legwork to recruit American Indian members and to beef up coverage of environmental issues both on reservations and in urban areas, it's by no means the

organization's only diversity initiative.

For instance, Membership Chair Sheppard's "priority" is working up a list of Latino and other reporters of diverse backgrounds to recruit for membership, she said. And African American environmental journalist Brentin Mock is championing diversity by advising conference organizers on practical ways to counterbalance societally ingrained patterns of status and privilege.

"The goal of diversity is not just to bring in people of color to talk about environmental justice, racism or diversity itself," Mock explained. "The goal should be to have them a part of every discussion, every panel and every topic, not just those that deal with race."

One conference tour proposal includes a visit to Oklahoma's historically black Langston University in Langston, OK. Staff at SEJ met with academic leaders to make sure Langston students have easy access to the annual conference, following up on contact made by SEJ board member Roger Witherspoon, a founder of the National Association of Black Journalists, or NABJ.

In the process, SEJ also brokered an informal partnership between the University of Oklahoma's Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication and the much smaller Langston. "It's my hope this will lead to a lasting relationship even after we leave," said Gaarder.

Calling the State of Oklahoma "itself a living breathing incubator for diversity," Gaarder added her hope that the 2015 conference will result in fruitful multicultural relationships and new SEJ mem-

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