

Outdoor Writers Association of America

# OUTDOORS UNLIMITED

The Voice of the Outdoors February 2012





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# OUTDOORS UNLIMITED

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## ON THE COVER

"Magpie" by Bill Vanderford

A member since 1985, Bill Vanderford is from Lawrenceville, Ga. Vanderford's photography is featured in this month's Portfolio on pages 12-13. Contact him at [billvanderford@me.com](mailto:billvanderford@me.com).

## OUTDOOR WRITERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

Our mission: improve the professional skills of our members, set the highest ethical and communications standards, encourage public enjoyment and conservation of natural resources and mentor the next generation of professional outdoor communicators.

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## Pay for play

In the public relations industry, our work with writers and corporate and agency people enables us to keep an ear to the ground on many topics. One such topic that comes up with such regular frequency that it's almost as reliable as night following day is "pay for play." That's a crude name applied to the actions of advertisers or their ad agencies trying to influence editorial coverage by promising to increase or threatening to reduce the media's advertising schedule.

To think that this sort of "negotiation" doesn't happen in our industry would be naive. Predictably, in many examples we've been privy to, the editors and freelancers privately vow revenge in the form of actually reducing exposure when they are forced to comply with the pay for play deal.

We realize many ad agency representatives and some on the client side in advertising or marketing may disagree and even have a success story they could use as a rebuttal to dismiss this memo as a self-serving public relations rant. Nevertheless, after 30 years in this business, we believe that pay for play is not in your best interest in the long run. Indeed, it's more like opening a Pandora's Box.

Few ad agencies understand the labor-intensive efforts a public relations program requires. It is much easier to merely wave the checkbook in front of revenue-starved media. Clients should ask their agencies if this "strategy" is just another way to grind out the billings.

Some may say they don't care how they get the ink, just so long as they get it; so what's the big deal, anyway?

The bottom line is: Does pay for play work? Once or twice, maybe. But there's always going to be a company with more money available to trump this gambit. If you happen to be the category leader, then your products will get in the news on their own merit. And, if you're launching a new product or innovation, the news will follow. It's in getting the follow-up and repeat publicity — this is the mark of a good PR program.

Every now and then, someone, either at the client's ad agency or on the sales staff of the media, thinks she's discovered lightning in a bottle — the Holy Grail — and it always involves raiding the client's budgets for more revenue.

This "solution" is to control, or attempt to control, the editorial content, receiving favorable media exposure by paying for it, rather than earning it through the traditional publicity methods.

This is the selling out of a media's most precious asset: its editorial integrity.

And when editorial integrity is compromised by pay for play, it can take years to earn it back.

The agency account executive, attempting to impress his client with media acumen and clout, declares authorship of what is known as in the business as pay for play.

This sounds like a great idea, but if so, why hasn't it caught on? It's not caught on to any large scale because someone, perhaps on

both sides of the selling equation, puts a stop to this because it is a foolish gambit.

The reader or viewer is smart and can smell a rat from a long ways off. There is a trust relationship between the reader and the media. When the editorial starts reading like ad copy, the readers will rebel, and savvy media management knows this.

While some may scoff, offering the opinion that this does indeed go on, I agree. But it doesn't go on in the media that make a difference. And no company can afford to pay for both editorial and advertising.

I've had clients actually say they were going to wave their checkbook (ad schedule) in the face of the magazine. And, if it works at all, it works only once. The company may get one shot at this kind of a deal, but it has forever made an enemy of the editorial side.

Some ad agencies that seem forever hungry for more projects that can be billed to the client just don't get it.

Companies cannot dictate what will be covered. The power of a long-term relationship with the editorial side is what will benefit your company.

Al Golin, McDonald's PR man, coined a phrase "trust bank," in which he encouraged McDonald's to always do the right thing and then some. Be a good contributing neighbor and be forthright on the occasional problem and McDonald's will benefit in the long run. His trust bank approach worked for McDonald's and it will work for your company.

One company, whose PR director had left for a new job, assigned its PR efforts to several freelance writers at the urging of its ad agency. The hope here was that the freelance writers' buddies would want to help their friends and would, therefore, run the material.

In fact, it backfired. Few helped these writers with any editorial placement. Why? They didn't get a piece of the action. One was even so naive and clueless that he showed up at a competitor's press event and proceeded to hand out his client's press material, hats and the like. He was promptly asked to leave. Long-term this gambit failed, and the writers have gone on to lesser careers, devoid of the respect of their peers.

Yet another company tried this same program with a writer. The writer was so unprepared for the actual work of a PR campaign that he actually asked us if we would bail him out by giving him our press mailing list, because beyond a couple of buddies, he didn't know who wrote for which media. Did we help him? We built our list the hard way. No way. Here's why.

As a former client once said: "Advertising is something we buy, PR is something we sell." ■

— OWAA President Mike Walker,  
mike@walkeragency.com

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*Members are encouraged to write about issues and topics. Views expressed to not represent the opinion or endorsement of OWAA, its staff, officers, directors or members. Opposing views are encouraged, as OWAA desires to create a forum for the exchange of ideas. Submit commentary to editor@owaa.org.*



MIKE WALKER

## Deadlines, deadlines, deadlines

We're in the midst of the deadline crunch ... The first couple months of the year end up being a list of one deadline after another for OWAA members.

I hope you took advantage of entering your best work in the 2012 Excellence In Craft contests — Feb.

I was the cut-off to get your entries submitted. The electronic format was more fully embraced by members this year – partly because of further refinement to the rules, partly because of a better submission system put together by OWAA staff. While



ROBIN GINER

the rules will be a work in progress over the next couple of years to get them honed to perfection (or near perfection, as the case may be), I think we're clearly on the right path to the EIC contests being a lean and mean competition that offers enough opportunities for members to win, without being overwhelming. If you didn't enter this year's contest, I hope you'll be keeping track of your best work for next year.

Feb. 1 was also the early bird deadline for conference registration. Folks are taking our advice and registering early; even if you missed the early bird cut off, there's still plenty of time to register. This is proving to be a popular conference locale, despite the remoteness. As of Jan. 31, 80 people have registered. Perhaps that remoteness is part of the draw. Speaking of "draw" — we'll be drawing the winner for the bison hunt on Kodiak Island on Feb. 2, keep an eye on your inbox for that announcement coming soon!

One upcoming deadline includes the March 1 cutoff to enter your application for the Madson Fellowship. Fellowship funds can be used for any number of continuing education opportunities from Goldenrod to OWAA's annual conference, or workshops and institutes held around the country by other writers groups and universities. Application details are at <http://owaa.org/programs/scholarships-fellowships/madson-fellowship/>.

Not sure if it's worth your time to apply for the Madson Fellowship? Well, last year only five applications were submitted. So the odds may very well be in your favor!

We're going to give the Goldenrod Writing Workshop a go again this year, and the Madson Fellowship is a way to help defer those costs, allowing you to enjoy a truly rewarding experience in western Montana this July. The dates for the 2012 Goldenrod Workshop are July 22-28, and it will be held at the University of Montana here in Missoula. Sign up by June 1 to secure your spot. Registration includes room and board, plus a full week of intensive instruction in outdoor communications. If you know of an outlet for us to market the workshop, please let us know. It's open to OWAA members and non-members alike.

Also, if you've not been to Goldenrod before, we will defer \$75 of your annual dues toward the price of registration. If you're not able to join us in Alaska, this is an opportunity to network with other outdoor writers, improve your skills and revel in America's "Last Best Place." Contact OWAA headquarters for more details.

Do you have a son or daughter who's following in your footsteps? March 1 is also the deadline for college students to apply for the McDowell Scholarship. We have

roughly \$16,000 to award to students of outdoor communications fields including print, photography, film, art or broadcasting. Students must of graduate-level or entering their junior or senior year of undergraduate study in the 2012-13 school year. Application info can be found at <http://owaa.org/programs/scholarships-fellowships/bodie-mcdowell-scholarship/>.

If your youngsters are not yet of college age, don't overlook the Norm Strung Youth Writing Awards. If they had a story or poem printed in a newspaper, newsletter or other publication in 2011, they're eligible to enter that piece in the 2012 Norm Strung competition. You can enter work on behalf of other students if your publication printed their stories last year, too. Entry deadline is March 16. You can find the full list of rules on our website at [www.owaa.org/programs/contests/norm-strung-youth-writing-awards/](http://www.owaa.org/programs/contests/norm-strung-youth-writing-awards/). With the generous support of the Safari Club International Foundation, OWAA has \$1,700 to award to budding outdoor writers in grades 6-12.

These are just a few of the ways that OWAA serves the outdoor writing community, regardless of age or skill level. If you're not able to take advantage of these opportunities this year, please keep them in mind for the future. It's programs like these, along with the long list of member benefits, that sets OWAA apart from other writers groups. We're working hard to strengthen our community, improve opportunities and increase your skills so you can be the best at what you do. ■

— OWAA Executive Director Robin Giner,  
[rginer@owaa.org](mailto:rginer@owaa.org)



Jobs and editorial-needs listings are updated throughout the month!

Be sure to use your username and password.

[www.owaa.org/ou/category/market](http://www.owaa.org/ou/category/market)

## PRODUCT REVIEW

# Manfrotto 055XPROB kit

BY JON LAWTON

If you ask a photographer what piece of equipment is most essential, you're likely to hear a long list of favorite cameras or must have lenses. It's easy to get caught up in high-tech electronics when talking about photo gear, but sometimes the most useful piece of hardware can be a little more mundane. A tripod, for example, might not be the most exciting piece of gear in your kit, but without one you are eliminating many great photo opportunities.

The Manfrotto 055XPROB kit is a tripod and head system aimed at photographers that need to support up to 8.8 pounds of camera gear. Given that the average DSLR weighs in at less than 2 pounds, the 055XPROB kit gives you the option to hold even the heaviest camera-lens combination. The tripod itself weighs in at 5.3 pounds and is made of aluminum. Each leg consists of three extending sections that feature quick-action locking levers that make it easy to set the tripod to the desired height. Another nice aspect of this tripod is that when the legs and center column are fully extended, the tripod head rests at 5.8 feet from the ground. This is a definite advantage for taller folks who will no longer have to hunch over to see through the viewfinder. This tripod also features a pivoting center column that can be locked in the horizontal position; and this, combined with spreading the legs to their widest setting, allows you to position the head a mere 10cm above the ground, making it great for ultra low-angle shooting.

The Manfrotto 804RC2 head is fitted on the top of the tripod legs. This three-way pan/tilt head nicely compliments the tripod. The head can support equipment up to 8.8 pounds and has three independent locking handles for precise control over your camera's position. The head is made from a composite



material that Manfrotto states is as strong as aluminum but roughly half the weight. The top of the head also features a spirit level and a quick-release plate system so you can easily mount or remove the camera from the head.

The 055XPROB legs and 804RC2 head are a great combination. The large range of height adjustments paired with superior build quality make it an ideal kit for a photographer looking for a rock solid support system that will last for many years of service. This kit sells for \$239 and also ships with the Manfrotto MBAG80, a zippered ballistic nylon carrying case with shoulder strap. ■

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*If you have any questions about this Manfrotto 055XPROB kit or any other photo-related topic, please contact Jon Lawton at [jlawton@wbhunt.com](mailto:jlawton@wbhunt.com).*

# Alaska's Fishing Ferry Lands

**BY CHRISTOPHER BATIN**

If you fish, hunt, scuba dive, kayak or enjoy any and all outdoor sports, you should know and appreciate the Alaska state ferry system.

Today's ferry system has metamorphosed into the way travel used to be: something to look forward to, not only for the destination involved, but to savor the simple joy of travel. For instance, the MV Chenega is adorned with Alaska decor, fully equipped snack bar, comfortable tables, seats, and even plush work areas with computer desks. You'll not only be at your destination faster than you can drive (some destinations you can't drive to), but also refreshed once you arrive, with your car and fishing tackle in tow. Unlike the airlines, I wasn't crammed into a middle seat and my luggage wasn't lost. I could get up and walk around, and I had a window seat for the entire journey. I had my choice of good food and drink, and was able to take a walk on deck, get some fresh ocean air, and watch for whales and seabirds. When I arrived, I climbed into my own truck, turned on my own music, had my own gear and equipment and enjoyed the familiarity of my own possessions.

This is the only way to travel to and fish Alaska's coastal areas. How far you travel and what you do depends on your budget and the time you have allocated for your trip.

A ferry-fishing excursion can be virtually instantaneous as long as there is room aboard the ferry. I often drive to Valdez for some saltwater salmon fishing; the drive from Fairbanks or Anchorage takes about six to seven hours with stops. While the drive from Anchorage along the Glenn Highway and down Thompson Pass is always spectacular, sometimes I just want to forego the stress of driving. The ferry allows me to arrive in Valdez, fully rested and ready to go.

For trips farther afield, consider Cordova,



The Alaska state ferry MV Aurora. Photo by **Chris Batin**.

the Alaska Peninsula or Kodiak. You can trailer a boat to these locations and have some spectacular action.

Janet Buckingham, executive director with the Kodiak Convention and Visitors Bureau, never misses a chance to remind me what great salmon fishing they have on Kodiak. The water is clear, no glacial influences, and the chances for halibut and other bottomfish are excellent. Take your motorhome, choose from plenty of places to camp, or choose the hotel and charter route. The Kodiak CVB is one of the friendliest you'll find anywhere and best of all, it's served by the ferry system.

The MV Kennicott will operate full time running from Bellingham, Wa., across the Gulf of Alaska to Whittier and Kodiak, providing a convenient, direct route for passengers and vehicles bound for the southcentral or southwest regions of the state. Why opt for an expensive cruise when you can drive your own vehicle onto the ferry, take in the sights of the Inside Passage along the way, and dock in Whittier on the fourth day. If time is not an issue, it's possible to disembark at select cities along the Inside Passage and fish on the way north.

Changing your schedule is not the headache it often is with the airlines. I had to change my ticket a few times and the cost

was only \$10 each. Make the change and you're rebooked.

There are more marine highway angling destinations than you can experience in a decade of angling summers, and the ferry folks who work for the state will help you with most any of your trip planning. I don't have the space here to provide you with the details of ferry operation, schedules and routes, but you can find all the details at [www.ferryalaska.com](http://www.ferryalaska.com).

Check out the ferry discount for members at [www.owaa.org/2012conference/2012/01/12/complimentary-passage-on-the-alaska-marine-highway-system](http://www.owaa.org/2012conference/2012/01/12/complimentary-passage-on-the-alaska-marine-highway-system).

I'm sure that once you've sampled the benefits of the Alaska Marine Highway system, the state's ferry lands takes on a whole new meaning. ■



*Chris Batin has been a member since 1979. He is the 2012 conference local chair. He is also editor and publisher of Alaska Angler, and Alaska Hunter Productions and Video Productions. Contact him at [ChrisBatin@AlaskaAngler.com](mailto:ChrisBatin@AlaskaAngler.com).*

# Basic rules for writers

BY MARY J. NICKUM

Are there basic rules for all writers? I've been asked that question many times. There are books written to help writers write. Some are better than others. "The Chicago Manual of Style" and "A Handbook for Scholars" are invaluable resources. Others are grammar books, which are useful but don't get to the nitty gritty of what is really required of a writer who wants to make a living writing. The following rules are made by writers for writers and are meant to be encouraging as well as instructive.

## RULE NO. 1: DETERMINATION

Determination is the quality of being determined to do or achieve something; resoluteness. You must first make a decision to write. This sounds simple enough. Most writers have made that decision. But, there is more to it than just deciding to write. What to write, and how, are next. The decision of what to write is based partially on your knowledge. Most writers who are knowledgeable about fishing will be unwilling to tackle an article about the development of cancer tumors. Determination must be tempered by knowledge. The often repeated writer's adage, "write what you know," is applicable here.

Resoluteness, however, is a useful word when discussing determination. To make your resolve tangible, set goals. These points will assist you in your goal-setting exercise:

- Be specific about what you want to achieve. Instead of saying "I want to finish an article by fall," state "My article, 'Fishing in the Arctic,' will be completed by Oct. 1, including all editing and photography."
- Break this goal into smaller chunks — baby steps of about 500 words per day. Be sure to schedule work with photographs concurrently.

Not taking this step leaves you wide open to missing your deadline. Giving yourself an achievable goal means you are more likely to reach it. The results must be measurable, otherwise how do you know you've achieved what you set out to do?

- Is the goal attainable? Don't set your sights too high. Always work within your own abilities, otherwise you will become disheartened. Keeping ahead of your goal allows for all those "life situations" you may, and probably will, encounter.

- Always give yourself an end date. This gives you a specific timeframe in which to work.

If you are resolved to write a quality piece, which most writers are, you have observed the first rule for writing. Your written goals will provide you with a roadmap for the next rule.

## RULE NO. 2: DISCIPLINE

The second rule is harder than you think. Writing requires

discipline. Most writers' advisors say "write something everyday." It doesn't have to be submission quality. Writing a letter to your son or daughter away at college, writing in a blog or writing ideas for future stories all count for this task. The main idea here is to cultivate a regimen for daily work. Make time to write. This can be difficult if you have a full-time job that is not writing related. If evenings and weekends are the only available time, other family commitments must be taken into account. Look to writers' blogs to exchange ideas as to how other writers have accomplished this seemingly insurmountable feat.

Writer's block is a well known malady for writers. If you just can't get to the next paragraph or sentence, take a break. If that doesn't help, listen to your favorite music or change writing venues. Try a coffee shop or a library. Having resources close at hand might help, too.

## RULE NO. 3: FOCUS

A writer must focus. If you jump from one topic of interest to another several times when writing a story, the outcome will appear jumbled and without direction. The same is true if you attempt to write while personal issues are distracting you. No writer can do her piece justice when struggling with unrelated issues.

Here are three questions to answer to help you focus:

- Who is the intended audience of my piece?
- What is the single most important point of my piece?
- If the reader thought about my piece one week after reading it, what would their dominant recollection be?

After deciding to write, you must decide what to write and then set a writing schedule for yourself. Make sure your goals are attainable. Writing takes discipline. You should write something every day. If you have a chosen topic and a deadline goal, work toward that goal. If there are days when you can't work on your piece, write something anyway. When setting out to write, be sure you can focus on the job. Don't let yourself be distracted by outside events or demands. Scheduling and adhering to that schedule will help you to produce a piece within the designated timeframe. Determination, discipline and focus will give you tools to produce a quality piece. ■



A member since 2000, Mary J. Nickum is from Fountain Hills, Ariz. She is editor of *World Aquaculture*. Nickum writes for *Northern Aquaculture*, *Hatchery International* magazine, *Fish Farming News*, and *Aquaculture North America*. She also writes stories for children and is author of "Mom's Story: A Child Learns about MS." Contact her at [mjnickum@hotmail.com](mailto:mjnickum@hotmail.com), [www.marynickum.com](http://www.marynickum.com).

# Crossing over to the enlightenment side

BY BILL GRAHAM

**M**ark Taylor, newspaperman and OWAA first vice president, poked fun at me a bit when he came up with the title for a session I co-hosted at the 2011 OWAA conference: “Crossing Over to The Dark Side.”

I’m now in my second year as a media specialist — which often includes public relations duties — after a quarter century digging facts from public relations folks as a reporter at a major metropolitan daily newspaper.

Mainstream news reporters commonly, if not daily, search desperately for information, quotes and contacts for stories born in the morning and sent through editors to consumers by late afternoon. They often work with bosses breathing down their necks and demanding unique information that can set the story apart from competitors’ news.

Many times I’ve been under pressure and angrily frustrated when a PR spokesman could not or would not help me, or seemed to be desperately trying to spin the story away from the truth with information he did provide.

But there are two sides to this story.

Many times I got excellent and timely information and help from PR professionals at agencies and companies who made it possible for me to make deadline and do so in fine fashion.

Also, many times I wondered, could I do what they do for a living?

Often the answer I told myself was “no.” I felt too addicted to the swashbuckling reporter ways and the adrenaline rush on the breaking news front lines. I’d miss the quiet satisfaction of having my byline appear before thousands of readers.

Well, I was wrong. I’ve crossed over and survived on the so-called dark side. In fact, when you’re working for a cause you believe in, it’s pretty nice.

My title is now media specialist for the

Missouri Department of Conservation. I work a 30-county area in western Missouri from an office in Kansas City. I’m extremely lucky because my entire career I’ve been pointed toward outdoor journalism.

For news folks facing layoffs or wishing for a change of pace, I believe you can survive and thrive, too, with a job title such as public relations, media relations, marketing director, spokesman, communications director or outreach coordinator.

Here’s how:

- Land a job with a company or agency you believe in. It’s refreshing to be an advocate and defender for good products or causes. There’s nothing wrong, either, with taking a PR job of any kind to learn the ropes and keep the financial ship afloat until a job more lucrative to you opens.

- Be yourself and provide accurate information. Reporters have super sensitive phoniness detectors whether in person, by phone or in digital communications. You’ll have points for the cause that you want noted in a story, but honesty and sincerity are the most effective way to sell those points.

- Be courteous. Reporters encounter rudeness regularly from the public and fellow staffers. Your courtesy encourages them to listen and use what you’re saying.

- Keep the information simple. I’ve had the bad habit of being asked a question, on-air or by somebody with a notepad, and I’ve proceeded to utter a lead, lengthy details and a conclusion in a long statement that greatly resembles a finished newspaper story. Not good. Give basics, let them ask for details.

- Be organized and keep appointment calendars. Reporters can survive by reacting and digging because their specialty is gathering a story quickly and moving on to the next one. A media relations staffer has more complex task list. I’ve written letters and speeches for other staffers, connected radio show hosts with biologists far afield, run down photos, located facts and attended

mandatory meetings, all in a day’s time.

- Be patient with a new office culture. Newsrooms and the people who inhabit them are quite similar in routines and the personalities. Often, it’s the opposite in the business and government agency sectors. Be prepared to check your swashbuckling ways at the door. Don’t be too quick to judge potential friends and enemies among your fellow workers. Evaluations change as you become more familiar.

Crossing over to what I call the enlightenment-provider side can pose challenges such as boggy bureaucracies and unfamiliar pressures as a public or corporate servant.

I’m an agency spokesman, and I felt so strange the first few times I was interviewed by reporters or appeared live on radio and television. I was no longer in control of the story’s final tone and details. And I have already been burned by bad reporting or editing. There are good reasons why media reps are cautious.

Still, I’ve survived those challenges and I love my job. There are golden days where I’m writing nature stories, taking photos and sending them to media outlets as a journalism product much like my newspaper creations. My audiences for some stories are often far larger than before. And there are also days when I’m able to plug other journalists into stories where my presence is never known to the media consumer, but I know I’ve helped conservation.

I’m grateful for the chance to work on the other side of the fence. In this turbulent journalism era, I encourage reporters and editors not to fear crossing over. ■



*Bill Graham is media specialist for the Missouri Department of Conservation, he is also a freelance writer and photographer covering outdoor sports and natural science, bluegrass music and acoustic instruments. A member since 1985, Graham can be reached at [plattefalls@centurylink.net](mailto:plattefalls@centurylink.net).*

# The misinformation trap

BY JOHN G. NICKUM

**W**ant to lose your credibility quickly? The “misinformation trap” can destroy your status as a knowledgeable authority in a heartbeat. If your readers, listeners, or viewers do not catch your mistakes, a competitor or that jilted lover from back in your high school days is waiting for the chance to expose your ignorance. Credibility is as hard to regain as your youthful body.

Misinformation is part of our daily lives. Politicians do it all the time. They live and die politically from misinformation, disinformation and even lies. They hire “spin doctors” specifically to produce misinformation. Trial lawyers justify misinformation as a court room technique because it’s up to the judge and jury to separate fact from fiction. Professional ethics seem a bit vague and flexible for them. “Truth in advertising” for the corporate world seems more myth than reality. Ideologues, whatever their passion, may actually believe what they are presenting as “truth,” even though there is no evidence to support their statements. However, we outdoor communicators operate under different standards. Our audiences expect accurate information and we have an ethical responsibility to present it.

Disinformation and lying are rare in our outdoor communications world, but what about misinformation? Are we always sure about the accuracy of our information? If the subject matter is within our experience and areas of expertise, we generally have enough background to separate the wheat from the chaff. As long-time participants in outdoor sports, we know these subjects thoroughly; but what about that “environmental stuff”? The environment affects almost everything we do in the outdoors — and misinformation, disinformation, and outright lies about it are common. Much of conventional green wisdom is only opinion or belief, but it is justified by proponents

“Disinformation and lying are rare in our outdoor communications world, but what about misinformation? Are we always sure about the accuracy of our information?”

— JOHN G. NICKUM

because the goal of saving the environment is worthy and honorable even if the information presented is not.

Stories about our outdoor experiences simply need to be told in an interesting manner. The facts of who, what, when and where can provide all we need to create a good story. Each of us has memories of situations and outdoors people who were way outside the box. Stories about these situations, animals, and people are easy and fun.

Sticking to proven science can be a harder task, even though nature is full of surprises, strange critters and some unusual human characters. We often feel the need to get beyond basic facts to hook our readers, listeners, or viewers when ecology and the environment provide the core of our story. Accurate biology and ecology may impress scientists, but will it attract the average reader? Why not kick it up a notch — a little embellishing might create an even better story? Don’t let the facts get in the way of a good story? A little speculation here, an unreliable source there — the fictional story grows and the misinformation trap closes on us.

You do not have to be a scientist to ensure your information is scientifically valid, but it does take awareness of the ease with which misinformation can creep in to our material. Writing about causative factors — why the pheasant population is down,

why montane glaciers are melting, how Asian carp got into the Mississippi River, whether chronic wasting disease is a human health risk — these are tough questions. It’s easy to speculate about the “why” of nature without bothering to add that it’s just your opinion. Do you feel the misinformation trap closing on you?

There are many sources that can protect you from providing misinformation; and there are simple ways to spot misinformation and less than accurate opinions. Scientifically valid information includes statements about probabilities — how certain is the author? Beware of sources filled with “could,” “might” and “may,” especially if the author is promoting a cause, including more funding for her research. I have found agency spin specialists guilty of publishing similar vague statements for the purpose of promoting their agency’s policies and practices. The topic of your story should be interesting to your followers, but make sure that you can also tell them the likelihood that it is accurate. Probability — certainty and uncertainty — is a basic part of science. Don’t be satisfied with a wild a\*\* guess, or even a scientific wild a\*\* guess. Your readers, viewers, listeners consider you to be an authority. They want to believe that your words are true.

I suggest that we have a professional and ethical responsibility to avoid the misinformation trap. Take the time to verify and validate information. Always wear your “bull” detector and learn the characteristics of propaganda. Don’t repeat it. Don’t produce it. Your professional credibility



A member since 2005, John G. Nickum is a writer, editor and educator. Contact him at [jgnickum@hotmail.com](mailto:jgnickum@hotmail.com)

# To blog, or not to blog

BY CHRIS HUNT

As OWAA prepares to welcome bloggers into the fold as full members, it might be a good time for existing members to consider the benefits of venturing a bit more aggressively into the digital media communication world.

“Bloggers” is a very general term used to describe the new brand of outdoor communicators who will soon be joining our ranks. These are folks who operate independent or sponsored Web logs (or blogs), use video and audio for digital broadcasting (better known as podcasting) and who find a way to make these cutting-edge tools relevant to consumers of hunting, fishing and outdoors information.

OWAA’s acceptance of these folks into the fold is likely a bit overdue, but given the challenges of determining how and where these communicators fit into our professional organization, it’s no wonder it’s taken some time to make it happen. And, of course, questions about qualifications needed to be addressed.

Are these folks truly outdoor communicators? Are they contributing to our craft in a constructive and productive way? Are they “professional?”

I would argue yes on all counts. And I would venture to say that dozens of existing OWAA members — perhaps hundreds — would now qualify for membership based on their blogging credentials alone. In fact, some of OWAA’s longest-standing members are blogging today, and using this unique medium as a way to supplement their existing outdoor communications work.

Making a living at blogging is ... challenging. Unless a blogger is particularly prolific and has built a loyal following of readers over a significant amount of time — thus making his or her blog worthy of attracting advertisers — blogging isn’t a way to make a dependable income. Rather,

as OWAA stalwarts **Joel Vance** and **Dave Richey** might tell you, blogging is another arrow in the outdoor communicator’s quiver. It’s a great way to stay sharp as a writer and improve in the fields of audio, video and photography. It’s an effective way to market yourself and your work while providing what amounts to samples of your expertise.

And let’s face it. Traditional outdoor writing these days is riddled with hazards ranging from an ever-shrinking market, editors who are slow to pay for our work and dwindling editorial rates. As freelance writer Bruce Smithhammer, who blogs as part of a team at [busterwantstofish.com](http://busterwantstofish.com), said, “Why put yourself at the mercy of an establishment that not only dictates your content, but then is loathe to actually pay for it?”

Smithhammer is like a lot of freelancers who have turned to blogging, not necessarily to make a living, but for the editorial freedom that comes with it. He freely admits that “Buster” doesn’t earn him a penny, but it does keep his writing and photography skills in tune and, he argues, it offers him an opportunity to be as creative and edgy as he wants — after all, he’s his own editor.

Some bloggers actually do collect a modest income from their work. Take **Kirk Deeter** for instance, who blogs at Field & Stream’s website as part of the Fly Talk endeavor he shares with photographer Tim Romano. Deeter collects a modest monthly stipend from the blog, but, he says, “It doesn’t pay the bills.”

Rather, he says, Fly Talk ([fieldandstream.com/blogs/flytalk](http://fieldandstream.com/blogs/flytalk)) serves as an effective barometer for future work — if a topic he casually blogs about attracts significant interest from an online audience, he deems it worth further investigation, and perhaps worth evolving the topic into a full-fledged article he might one day pitch to the print version of Field & Stream, or perhaps another publication.

“I went into it kicking and screaming,”

Deeter says. “After all, I worked hard for a long time to develop my skills as a journalist. The thought that some guy sitting in his basement in his underpants could command attention really turned me off.”

But, over time, he began to see benefits to blogging, not the least of which was having a permanent digital library with this name on it. And, like anything else, Deeter says, quality work attracts interest.

“It’s like ‘open-mic night,’” he says. “The people with talent, drive and passion will draw the attention of an audience.”

While most who participate in today’s vast and diverse blogosphere will never earn a cent from their online blogging efforts, there is some modest organization among bloggers who focus on outdoors topics. In 2010, Rebecca Garlock (who blogs under at [outdoress.com](http://outdoress.com)) teamed up with Joe Wolf ([wolfwaters.blogspot.com](http://wolfwaters.blogspot.com)) and hatched the Outdoor Blogger Network ([outdoorblogger-network.com](http://outdoorblogger-network.com)). Today, just over a year after its inception, the OBN is a virtual clearing house for more than 1,000 outdoor bloggers who share ideas, content and even host contests and post regular features. In short, the outdoor blogosphere is becoming much more organized and, I would argue, much more relevant. It’s becoming, for lack of a better term, its own medium.

One of the challenges outdoor communicators continually face is the constantly evolving media landscape that makes our work — and getting paid for it — much more challenging, especially if we’re not, at least in part, willing to evolve to meet the needs of today’s readers, listeners and viewers. OWAA’s willingness to open its doors to outdoor bloggers is part of that evolution, and while we may not see a huge spike in member numbers right away, perhaps the inclusion of bloggers into the fold will encourage some long-time members to make that leap and get involved in these “new”

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

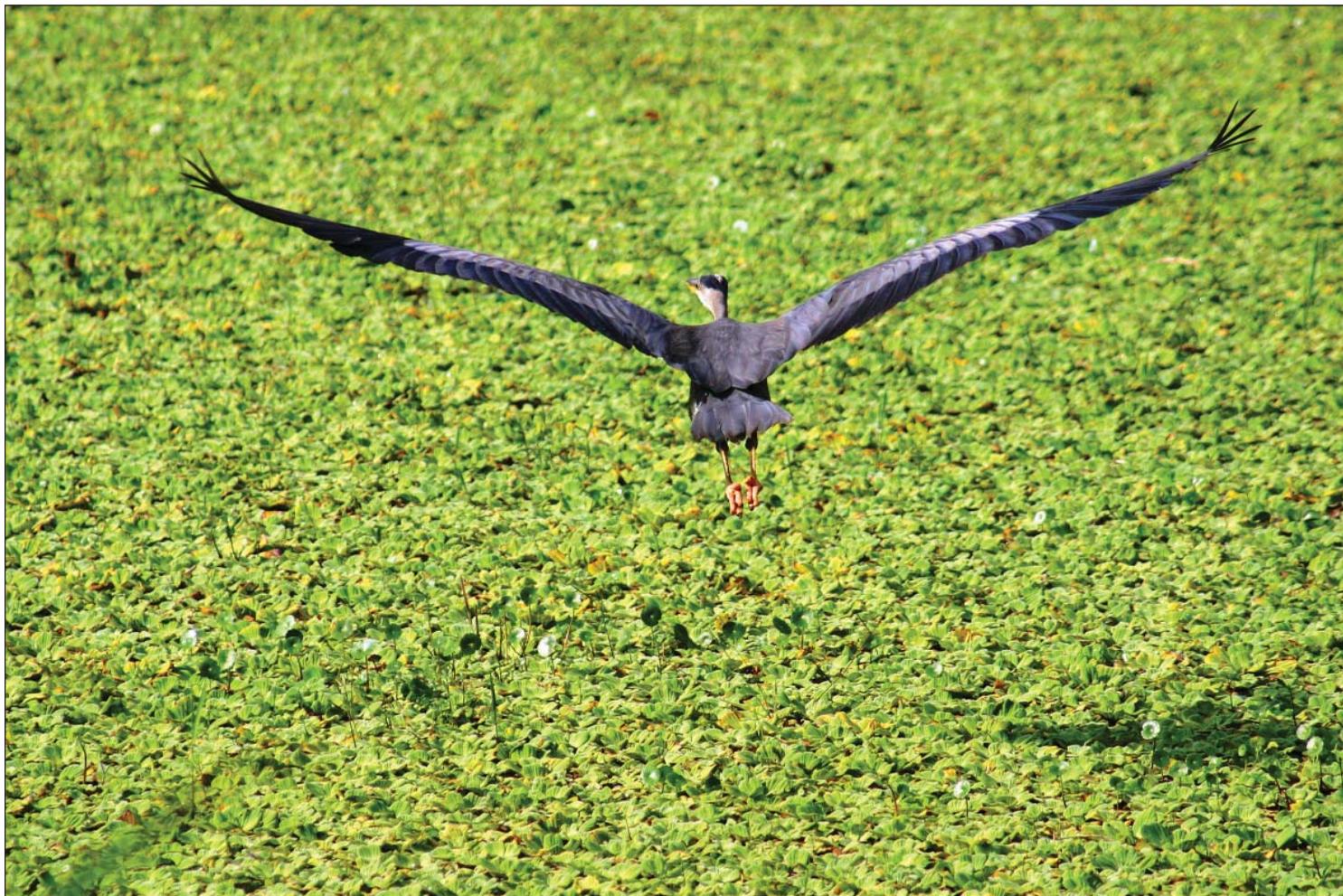
# Portfolio

by Bill Vanderford

**B**ased in Atlanta, Ga., **Bill Vanderford** is an award-winning editor/writer/photographer/videographer. He has written feature articles about outdoors and travel for *Field & Stream*, *Sports Afield*, *In-Fisherman*, *Hall County Magazine*, *Accent Gwinnett Magazine*, *Legacy on Lanier Magazine*, *The Gwinnett Daily Post*, *Forsyth County News*, *Gainesville Times*, and is a former editor with *Outdoor Life* magazine. He is the travel editor of the monthly *Lakeside Magazines*, and has contributed to several other publications like *Georgia Magazine* and websites, including [GoWorldTravel.com](http://GoWorldTravel.com), [OnLineFishermen.com](http://OnLineFishermen.com), and [www.odumagazine.com](http://www.odumagazine.com). His writing and photography have won more than two hundred awards. Vanderford is also a member of several professional writing organizations.



Fishing at dawn.



Heron over the glades.



PHOTOS BY BILL VANDERFORD

The eyes of a wolf.



Fishing at sunrise.



Making the kill.

*View more photos by Bill at [www.owaa.org/ou/category/portfolio](http://www.owaa.org/ou/category/portfolio)*

## DONORS

December brought monetary gifts from generous donors. These tax-deductible donations are dedicated to funds designed to boost OWAA efforts ranging from education programs to operating costs. For details about OWAA funds, contact OWAA headquarters at 406-728-7434.

### **Bodie McDowell Scholarship Fund**

**Thomas Dillon**  
**Dr. Paul Quinnett**

### **John Madson Fellowship Fund**

**R.W. Altman**  
**Chris Madson**

### **Operating Fund**

**R.W. Altman**  
**Tom Huggler**  
**Chris Madson**  
**Katie McKalip**  
**Craig Rieben**

### **Restricted Endowment Fund**

**R.W. Altman**

## NEW MEMBERS

**Robert Ford**  
**Tom Reale**  
**Derek Eiri**  
**Kelly Jo McDonnell**

## PROPOSED NEW MEMBERS

**Paul G. Koenig**, 1166 Solo Bend Dr., Wentzville, MO 63385. (H) 636-614-6729, pgkoenig@centurylink.net. Applying for Active Membership; sponsored by **Mary Nickum**.

**Laurel Neme**, 93 Butternut Ln., Shelburne, VT 05482. (H) 802-985-1136, (W) 802-238-4040, laurel@laurelneme.com. Author of "Animal Investigators," a "CSI for wildlife" book that has been featured on ABC's Nightline and NPR's Science Friday. Hosts "The Wildlife" weekly radio show on WOMM-LP in Burlington and writes regularly for mongabay.com and Jeff Corwin Connect. (Christopher) Applying for Active Membership; sponsored by **Matt Miller**.

**Bridger Pierce**, Warm Springs Production, 235 N. 1st St. W., 2nd Floor, Missoula, MT 59801. (H) 406-581-8971, (W) 406-830-3128, (F) 866-800-3440, bridger@warmsprings.tv. Senior producer at Warm Springs Production, a company which produces eight series for Sportsman Channel and Outdoor Channel. Been involved in producing all eight series. (Lauren) Applying for Active Membership; sponsored by

## ASSOCIATION UPDATE

### **Katie McKalip.**

**Thomas B. Simonds**, 413 N. Jefferson St., Moscow, ID 83843. (H) 208-301-4961, simo@vandals.uidaho.edu. Active duty Marine sergeant participating in commissioning program at the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho, majoring in English literature. Formerly a combat engineer with combat deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan. (Julie) Applying for Student Membership; sponsored by Ron McFarland.

**Aaron Teasdale**, 1137 Butte Ave., Missoula, MT 59802. (H) 406-327-8594, (W) 406-529-3126, digaaron@yahoo.com. Freelance writer and photographer for 14 years. Work has appeared in more than 50 publications. Currently contributes features (words and images) to Sierra, British Columbia, Adventure Cyclist, BIKE, Mountain, Backcountry and Headwall. (Jacqueline) Applying for Active Membership; sponsored by **Paul Queneau**.

**Andy Whitcomb**, 7919 W. Lakeview Rd., Stillwater, OK 74075. (H) 405-385-0094, (W) 405-762-6754, (F) 405-377-0131, andy@lacebarkinc.com. Freelance writer published in Oklahoma Today, Outdoor Oklahoma and Pennsylvania Angler and Boater. Blogs weekly for www.takemefishing.org. Columnist for www.espnoutdoors.com (2008-2011). (Shannon) Applying for Active Membership; sponsored by **Bruce Cochran**.

## REINSTATED MEMBERS

**Oak Duke**, Wellsville Daily Reporter, (Active Member) 159 N. Main St., Wellsville, NY 14895. (H) 585-593-2527, (W) 585-593-5300, (F) 585-593-5303, oduke51895@aol.com, www.wellsville-daily.com/outdoors. Publisher, The Wellsville Daily Reporter, columnist, lecturer. Book author, "Whitetail Bowhunting" and "Springtime in the Turkey Woods."

**Mark Herwig**, (Active Member) 1783 Buerkle Cir., St. Paul, MN 55110. (W) 651-209-4951, (F) 651-773-5500, mherwig@pheasantsforever.org. Editor, Pheasants Forever Journal, Quail Forever Journal, and Upland Tales Youth Magazine.

Photographer, hunting, wildlife. Stock available. Available for assignments.

**Tom Keer**, (Active Member) P.O. Box 2023, 75 Baker Rd., Wellfleet, MA 02667. (H) 508-349-7001, (W) 508-349-3473, tomkeer@hotmail.com, www.tomkeer.com. Freelance writer specializing in outdoor writing. Frequent contributor to more than a dozen outdoor publications including Field & Stream, American Angler and Saltwater Fly Fishing. Northeast field editor at Fly Fisherman, and contributing editor at Fly Fish America.

**Kevin Wright**, (Active Member) 1720 N. Main St., Canton, IL 61520. (H) 309-645-3514, (W) 309-645-3514, wrightsrca@prodigy.net. Columnist, freelancer, wildlife photographer.

## CREDENTIALS REVIEWS

The following members successfully passed a review of their member credentials:

**Martin Armstrong**  
**John Cacciutti**  
**Gary Engberg**  
**Jason L. Jenkins**  
**Gary W. Moore**  
**Web Parton**  
**Paul Tawrell**  
**Jeffrey F. Williams**

## NEW SUPPORTING GROUPS, AGENCIES AND BUSINESSES

**Lake Placid CVB/Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism**, 2608 Main St., Lake Placid, NY 12946. Contact: Kimberly Rielly, director of communications. (W) 518-523-2445, (F) 518-523-2605, kim@lakeplacid.com, www.lakeplacid.com. The accredited destination marketing organization for the Lake Placid, Lake Champlain, Schroon Lake and Whiteface regions of New York's Adirondacks.

**Oklahoma Tourism & Recreation Department**, 120 N. Robinson, Ste. 600, Oklahoma City, OK 73102. Contact: Austin Tackett, travel communications coordinator. (W) 405-230-8412, (F) 405-230-8613, austin@travelok.com, www.travelok.com. State agency dedicated to the promotion of Oklahoma as a tourism destination.

## REINSTATED SUPPORTING GROUPS, AGENCIES AND BUSINESSES

## MEMBER NEWS

Have you won any awards  
or done something equally awesome?

Email news to OU Editor  
at [aschroeder@owaa.org](mailto:aschroeder@owaa.org).

### Ricciuti writes column for Patch news platform

Full-time freelancer **Ed Ricciuti** has begun a column for Patch, the online hyperlocal news platform. Outdoors With Ed Ricciuti covers the full spectrum of natural history, conservation issues, wildlife management, fishing, hunting and biology related to nature's world. Ricciuti writes for Connecticut (Killingworth-Durham-Middlefield) but much of his material, is picked up across the country.

### Lynde, Schafer receive regional Emmy for Environmental Program

Arizona Wildlife Views producers **Carol Lynde** and **Gary Schafer** took home the Emmy for Environmental Program from the Rocky Mountain Southwest Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences on Oct. 15, 2011, in Phoenix, Ariz. This makes a total of 12 Emmys for Lynde and six Emmys for Schafer.

The winning program featured several stories highlighting the Arizona Game and Fish Department's commitment to conserve wildlife and habitat in Arizona.

### Aeon Marine's Beavertail Skiffs release series featuring Apte

**Stu Apte** has been given a designed consultant partner position with Aeon Marine's Beavertail Skiffs for the "Stu Apte Signature Series" that will be available in the marketplace by late January 2012.

Apte promises his signature series boat

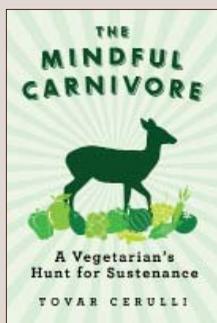
will be the most angler friendly backcountry boat ever produced, using advanced technology which eliminates the compromise between a shallow draft boat and a comfortable ride.

### Pollick announces retirement

Steve Pollick has announced that will be retiring from The Blade at year's end on Dec. 20 after 40 years "in harness."

In a note to OWAA headquarters staff, he says, "... It simply is 'time' for me. Peggy and I marked this point on our trail years ago and we have hiked there. The view is fine. Now it is [time] to slow down, relax and reflect more, and do less. I still plan to keep writing my biweekly 'Open Season' column in Ohio Outdoor News, and have left the door open with The Blade for occasional pieces, on my initiative only. Beyond that, time will tell. But I will not again face 190 deadlines a year, or their equivalent on the busyness quotient."

### The Mindful Carnivore: A Vegetarian's Hunt for Sustenance



By **Tovar Cerulli**, Pegasus Books, 212-504-2924, hardcover and e-book, 304 pp., \$26.95.

A vegan-turned-hunter explores our nutritional relationships with the larger-than-human world. Tracing the evolution of his dietary philosophy — from a fateful encounter with a brook trout to a rekindled relationship with the only hunter in his family — Cerulli's tale blends personal narrative with historical perspective. He sets contemporary debates in context by looking back over our changing natural and cultural landscapes. At once compassionate and probing, "The Mindful Carnivore" invites us to reconsider what it means to eat.

## BOOKSHELF

### Birding Trails – Texas: Prairies, Pineywoods, Panhandle

By **Jim Foster**, Sandhill Crane Press, [books@wildad-press.com](mailto:books@wildad-press.com), 866-400-2012, softcover, 400 pp., \$28.95.

Currently, there are more than 48 million birders in the country of which 20 million travel an average of 14 days each year to pursue their birding passion.

Birding is big in Texas, with more than 2.5 million resident birders and thousands of non-resident birders who visit the state each year. Texas is one of the top five birding states in the U.S. with at least 400 different species. In this book, there are more than 200 full-color photos of the key species of birds and more than 50 trail maps and a birder's check list for each region.



### ASSOCIATION UPDATE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

**Idaho Travel Council**, Box 83720, Boise, ID 83720-0083. Contact: Kellie Kluksdal, marketing and public relations. (W) 208-334-2470, (Toll Free) 800-635-7820, (F) 208-334-2631, [Kellie.Kluksdal@Tourism.Idaho.gov](mailto:Kellie.Kluksdal@Tourism.Idaho.gov), [www.visitidaho.org](http://www.visitidaho.org). Provides information and visual materials to writers inquiring about Idaho travel and recreation opportunities. Direct consumer

inquiries to Idaho Travel Council, above address/800-VISIT-ID/website.

**Ted Upgren**, [uppy@bektel.com](mailto:uppy@bektel.com).

### DECEASED MEMBER

**Charles W. Frank**

### CONTACT UPDATES

**John Tyson**, (W) 828-333-4992, 133 Buffalo Trail, Asheville, NC 28805.

### DIRECTORY CORRECTION

Radio and Television Broadcaster/Producer, Wisconsin: **Myhre, John** – Host and producer "Wisconsin Northland Outdoors," "Wisconsin Northland Outdoor Outlook" and "Northland Outdoors."

# Agenda for OWAA board meeting

OWAA's Board of Directors will meet via video conferencing on Feb. 11. Minutes from the meeting will be published in an upcoming issue of Outdoors Unlimited

## Board meeting agenda

Saturday, Feb. 11, 2012

President **Mike Walker**, presiding

### Call to Order (Walker)

### Roll Call (Katie McKalip)

- Receive motion to excuse any absentees
- Approval of actions by Executive Committee since July board meetings
- Information Item: Actions taken by the full Board of Directors since July board meetings.
- Approval of July meeting minutes

### Officer Report

- President's Report (Other officers will report with committees)

### Headquarters Report Report

- Executive Director's Report

### Standing Committee Reports

- Awards
- Board Nominating
- Conference Program
- Contests

- Craft Improvement
- Development
- Education
- Ethics
- Finance
- National Affairs & Environment
- Norm Strung Youth Writing
- Officer Nominating
- Past Presidents
- Sections
- Strategic Planning
- Technology

### Ad Hoc Committee Reports

- Marketing/Advertising Review
- Digital Media Journalist Recruitment
- Diversity
- Membership Criteria Review

### Old Business

- Revise Membership Criteria

### New Business

- Endowment Trustees Report
- Development of a Bylaws-Mandated Membership Committee (Chair should be

free to establish sub-committees to address each section of membership.)

- Development of a Bylaws-Mandated Marketing Committee
- Revise Education Committee charge to include more than McDowell Scholarship. Put them in charge of student outreach and student chapters as well.
- Minor adjustment to the OWAA Mission Statement
- Fundraising efforts
- 2014 Annual Conference Site Selection Report
- Four-Day conference proposal (optional for day-tours)
- Outdoors Unlimited - Analysis of OU Online readership (Google Analytics) and proposal for new publication schedule.

### Good of the Order

- (From **Bill Graham**) Encourage that all committees be established by July 1, and appropriate committees be voted on electronically.

### Adjournment

## BLOGGING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

ways to reach readers.

Don't be afraid to dip your toes in the blogosphere. It's cheap (free in most cases) and, as Deeter points out, it gives you a chance to communicate directly with the people who consume your content.

"Since I started blogging, I've met some

of the people who comment on my posts face to face. I've gone fishing with them. It reinforces the importance of getting to know your audience," he says. "And bloggers get to know their audience intimately."

Or, as Deeter might admit, he's evolved. He's embraced a medium and is now using it to make his traditional writing work pay off.

"And I can blog in my underpants," he said. ■



A member since 2007, Chris Hunt is the national communications director for Trout Unlimited, a freelance writer, and a blogger at [www.eatmorebrooktrout.com](http://www.eatmorebrooktrout.com). Contact him at [chunt@tu.org](mailto:chunt@tu.org).

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**Outdoor Writers Association  
of America Inc.  
615 Oak St., Ste. 201  
Missoula, MT 59801  
406-728-7434**

**February 2012**



## MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Looking to get more out of your membership? Need some talking points to “sell” OWAA to potential members or supporters?

This new monthly feature will highlight some of the more than 50 benefits OWAA provides to members and supporters.

### **COLLABORATION**

Interact with other like-minded individuals and groups in some of the following ways:

■ **Mentorship/menteeship:** Every new member must list a sponsor on their application (headquarters can provide sponsors if needed). These sponsors are willing to help mentor new members and show them the ropes about making the most of their OWAA membership.

Also, at OWAA’s annual conference, first-time attendees are assigned a mentor for the duration of the event. Mentors can help introduce you to other members and supports and are a great resource for questions about maximizing the conference experience. ■



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OWAAonline](http://www.facebook.com/OWAAonline)



[www.twitter.com/  
OWAAonline](http://www.twitter.com/OWAAonline)



[www.tinyurl.com/  
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