



Press Release

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Gulf oil spill, climate change on NC's coast are the focus of 2012 Reed Writing Award winners

Charlottesville, VA – SELC is pleased to announce the winners of this year's Phillip D. Reed Memorial Award for Outstanding Writing on the Southern Environment. In the Book category, author and naturalist David Gessner won for *The Tarball Chronicles: A Journey Beyond the Oiled Pelican and Into the Heart of the Gulf Oil Spill*, from Milkweed Editions. In the Journalism category, veteran environmental journalist Bruce Henderson won for "Climate of Change: The Reshaping of North Carolina," published in *The Charlotte Observer*. Gessner and Henderson will each receive a \$1,000 prize and an award.



In *The Tarball Chronicles*, Gessner journeys to ground zero of the BP oil disaster—the local diners, coastal marshes, fish camps, wildlife rehab centers and many other places along the Gulf of Mexico directly impacted by one of the worst environmental catastrophes in U.S. history. Through his travels and interviews with oceanographers, subsistence fishermen and others, two questions emerge for Gessner: How long will we mortgage our future for a present of convenience and speed? And how terrible would life really be if we never took such a dire risk again? The resulting book is a combination travelogue, manifesto, and love letter to the Gulf.

Says Gessner: "When I went down there, something like 42% of national television news coverage was about the spill. Since then, coverage has dropped off a cliff—but the story is far from over. The disaster is ongoing. That's why I'm so glad to receive the Reed award, to help draw attention back to the Gulf."

Gessner is the author of eight books and countless essays about the wild world, and past winner of a John Burroughs Award and a Pushcart Prize. His work has appeared in numerous magazines and journals including *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Boston Globe*, *Outside*, *The Georgia Review*, and *The Harvard Review*. He has taught environmental writing at Harvard and is currently an associate professor at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, where he founded the national literary journal, *Ecotone*. (Reed judges Bill McKibben and Joel Bourne, Jr. recused themselves from the Book category due to connections to one or more entrants. Gessner has been a past judge for the contest.)

What the Reed judges say:

- "Dave does an admirable job of telling the story of the Gulf oil spill in a way that is remarkably engaging and personal while also spinning a web of connections that extends far beyond the physical landscape where the spill occurred." - Hannah Fries

- “I loved *The Tarball Chronicles*. David Gessner caught just the right tone and touch to help us explore this disaster.” - Nikki Giovanni



For the three-part series in *The Charlotte Observer*, “[Climate of Change](#),” Journalism Award winner Bruce Henderson began with the idea of looking at observable, not just projected, impacts of climate change in North Carolina. They turned out to be numerous, particularly the effects of rising sea level on the state’s low-lying coastline and dynamic barrier island system. He notes that even as skeptics assail climate science, state engineers are factoring rising seas into plans for building roads and bridges on the coast, emergency planners are preparing inundation maps, and coastal communities are armoring their shores.

The series also looked inland, and described research showing how climate is affecting bird migrations, the survival of southern tree species and the spread of non-native invasive species. Henderson took numerous field trips, reviewed countless scientific articles, and conducted dozens of interviews over the course of eleven months to compile his information for the series—all while managing his other reporting assignments.

What the Reed judges say:

- “Henderson provides convincing evidence that climate change is upon us and should no longer be a debatable issue. Scientists, policy makers and others in North Carolina already are planning on how the state’s storied coastal area will deal with such change.” - Charles Seabrook

For 17 years, SELC’s Reed Environmental Writing Award has recognized the writers and journalists who use the power of the pen to capture our imagination of the South’s natural wonders, and raise our indignation at the forces that would destroy them. Educating and engaging the public in this way is central to the award’s mission and to SELC’s goal of safeguarding the South’s environment. Says long-time Reed award judge and friend, Don Webster: “In an environment of diminishing resources devoted to writing and publishing and reporting, it’s nice to see that there are still some people flying the flag. Makes me happy. And it’s important.”

SELC is grateful to this year’s judges, who generously volunteer their time and talent:

Joel Bourne, Jr.— Contributing writer, former Sr. Editor for the Environment at *National Geographic*

Bruz Clark—President and director of Environmental Grantmaking Program, Lyndhurst Foundation

Jim Detjen—Director, Knight Center for Environmental Journalism, Michigan State University

Hannah Fries— Assistant Editor *Orion* magazine

Nikki Giovanni—Grammy-nominated poet, writer; University Distinguished Professor, Virginia Tech

Silas House—Author of *The Coal Tattoo*, Assoc. Professor of Appalachian Studies, Berea College

Janet Lembke—Poet, essayist; *Because the Cat Purrs* and *Touching Earth*

Bill McKibben—Essayist, activist; *The End of Nature* and *Eaarth*; Middlebury College scholar

Deaderick Montague—Civic leader, writer; Vice President of SELC Board of Trustees

Janisse Ray—Essayist, poet, activist, *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*; Chatham University faculty

Charles Seabrook—Author, former environmental reporter for *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

Paul Sloan—Former Deputy Commissioner, Tennessee Dept. of Environment and Conservation

Donovan Webster—Journalist, author, Deputy Editor of *Virginia Quarterly Review*