Environmental Journalism Sample Intros:
Models from the Field

Dear journalists, as you start collecting ideas for your own pieces, be sure to check out the daily stories published all around the world in the genres of Environmental Analysis and Op-Ed. We encourage you to read though the sample openings below, gathering a sense of how journalists are framing their topic (analysis), and arguments (op-ed). Notice how in both genres, you, as the reader, are given the context (background info) and stakes (why you should care!), in just a few short paragraphs.

ANALYSIS SAMPLE INTROS

**Mumbai, Kolkata may get flooded by 2050**

*Jayashree Nandi, Hindustan Times*

A new research done by a US-based agency claims that more than three and a half crore people in India--as against the 50 lakh estimated earlier-- could actually be affected by annual coastal flooding by 2050 and that large parts of Mumbai, Navi Mumbai and Kolkata could be inundated if global CO2 emissions are not cut drastically.

The findings are based on CoastalDEM, a new digital elevation model developed by Climate Central, a US based climate research and communications organization.

According to the Climate Central study published in journal, Nature Communications, coastal flood risks assessments based on NASA’s Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM) have underestimated the elevation risks until now.
It’s Fish vs. Dams, and the Dams Are Winning
Lisa W. Foderaro, New York Times

NEWBURGH, N.Y. — For thousands of years, alewives and blueback herring have left the ocean to swim up the Hudson River to any one of scores of tributaries to lay their eggs. But in a more recent era, the fish have been literally hitting a wall as dams popped up all over the region, powering grist and woolen mills and later factories.

Today, there are an estimated 2,000 dams in the Hudson River Estuary between New York City and Albany, N.Y. Many are small and obsolete, abandoned by long-shuttered factories and serving no purpose other than to thwart fish migration and harm river ecology. Now a growing band of environmentalists wants to restore the waters to their natural state. They are targeting dams for removal not only in the Hudson Valley but across New York and the United States.

Young indigenous activists are leading on climate justice in Alaska
Tripp J Crouse, Grist

“We do not want to stop our ways of life. That’s why we’re here.” Seventeen-year-old Quannah Chasing Horse’s voice broke as she stood on stage in front of a sea of delegates at the Alaska Federation of Natives 2019 Convention in Fairbanks, Alaska. “We shouldn’t have to tell people in charge that we want to survive. It should be our number-one right. We should not have to fight for this.”

In October, at one of the largest gatherings of indigenous people in the U.S., the Hans Gwich’in and Lakota Sioux teenager stood with 15-year-old Nanieezh Peter (Neetsaii Gwich’in and Diné) and advocated for a resolution urging the federation’s voting members to take action on climate change as it affects Alaska Native people in a way that matches the scale and urgency of the problem. Chasing Horse and Peter, who spoke for the Elders
and Youth Conference, which drafted the resolution, also called on members to create a climate action task force within AFN and to declare a state of emergency on climate change.

Waiter, there’s a climate surcharge in my soup
Maddie Oatman, Grist

American restaurant diners don’t usually blink before adding an extra 15-20 percent tip onto their bills. In recent years, San Francisco’s eaters have even (mostly) grown accustomed to paying up to 6 percent extra for dinner to offset the cost of the city’s mandated healthcare program. Starting in January, at a smattering of eateries, California customers will see a new fee tacked on to their bill, though this one’s optional: One percent more to make their meal climate friendly.

The surcharge will fund a new program called Restore California, which is managed by the nonprofit Zero Foodprint. The initiative will funnel the money it raises into grants for farmers engaged in carbon farming — growing food with a focus on replenishing the soil’s health in order to increase the amount of carbon dioxide it can sequester.

Snow goes missing in mountains
Charlie Parker, The Times (London)

Climbers in T-shirts are finding arid summits on mountains usually carpeted in January snow, prompting new concerns about the impact of climate change.

Temperatures in Scotland this decade have been almost a degree warmer and the weather 5 per cent sunnier than average, the Met Office says, “due to increased atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases arising from human activity”.
On Thursday researchers scaled Beinn a’ Bhuird in the Cairngorms, where they reported a “startling lack of snow”. Iain Cameron, a researcher and lead author of an annual report for the Royal Meteorological Society, said: “At all the places that I would normally expect to see very deep drifts at the foot of the cliffs on the highest hills, there’s a real dearth of snow…”

‘Kids are taking the streets’
Lee van der Voo, The Guardian

Organizers in the youth climate movement plan an avalanche of activities beginning next week, determined to make the future of the climate the major issue of the 2020 election. Capitalizing on turnout in the September climate strikes, when 6 million people worldwide turned out to demand urgent action to address the escalating ecological emergency, young US organizers are making the leap from mobilization to demands. They’re planning widespread voter activation in the 2020 US presidential election as well as direct action targeting the fossil fuel industry and the banks and politicians that enable it.

“The headline message of the strikes in 2020 is: the kids are taking to the streets to strike for climate and they’re asking you to vote,” said Katie Eder, the executive director of Future Coalition, a communications and training hub for youth climate groups.

‘Dire outlook’: Researchers call for urgent Australian climate action
Peter Hannam, The Sydney Morning Herald

Eighty leading researchers have called on Australia’s governments to “acknowledge the gravity of the threat posed by climate change” and cut greenhouse gases “to safeguard against catastrophe”.

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An open letter, signed by present and recent Australian Research Council laureates, said while many factors contributed to the bushfire crisis, “the role of exceptional heat and dryness cannot be ignored”.

OP-ED SAMPLE INTROS

Why We Strike Again
Greta Thunberg, et al., Project Syndicate

MADRID – For more than a year, children and young people from around the world have been striking for the climate. We launched a movement that defied all expectations, with millions of people lending their voices – and their bodies – to the cause. We did this not because it was our dream, but because we didn’t see anyone else taking action to secure our future. And despite the vocal support we have received from many adults – including some of the world’s most powerful leaders – we still don’t.

Striking is not a choice we relish; we do it because we see no other options. We have watched a string of United Nations climate conferences unfold. Countless negotiations have produced much-hyped but ultimately empty commitments from the world’s governments – the same governments that allow fossil-fuel companies to drill for ever-more oil and gas, and burn away our futures for their profit.

Politicians and fossil-fuel companies have known about climate change for decades. And yet the politicians let the profiteers continue to exploit our planet’s resources and destroy its ecosystems in a quest for quick cash that threatens our very existence.
Our Cherished Rivers Are Under Threat
Macarena Soler, Monti Aguirre and Juan Pablo Orrego, New York Times

The rivers of Chilean Patagonia cascade from snow-capped mountains through sheer rock facades and rolling hills, radiating bright turquoise, deep blues and vivid greens. The Puelo. The Pascua. The Futaleufú. Each is as breathtaking and unique as the landscape it quenches.

But these rivers, like many worldwide, have been threatened by dam projects that aim to provide power for distant cities and mining operations. Only one-third of the world's 177 longest rivers remain free flowing, and just 21 rivers longer than 1,000 kilometers (621 miles) retain a direct connection to the sea.

If we are to arrest global climate change, prevent the toxifying of freshwater sources and do right by all those who depend on rivers for survival, we must return more rivers to their natural state.

Let It Be: Why We Must Save Alaska’s Pristine Tongass Forest
Kim Heacox, Yale Environment 360

When the railroad tycoon Edward H. Harriman fell ill from stress and too much work, his doctors recommended that he take a sea cruise. Unable to do anything in a small way, Harriman filled a ship with America’s foremost scientists, artists, and writers, and sailed the coast of Alaska for two months in the summer of 1899.

The expedition, which also included the renowned preservationists John Muir and George Bird Grinnell, found two Alaskas wherever they went, one for the taking, one for the saving. Each at odds with the other. Foremost among the places for saving was the great coastal rainforest of the Southeast Alaska panhandle, a wondrous world of mountains, ice
fields, tidewater glaciers, rock-ribbed fjords, coastal brown bears, bald eagles, and 11,000 miles of shoreline.

Eight years later, in 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt took a bold step in that direction by creating the 17-million-acre Tongass National Forest, the largest national forest in the United States. Today, the Tongass contains two national monuments and 19 designated wilderness areas. It also has countless undammed rivers and streams, and some of the world’s last great runs of wild Pacific salmon.

Dominated by Sitka spruce and Western hemlock — mighty conifers up to 10 feet in diameter and 800 years old — the Tongass represents the world’s largest remaining temperate rainforest. Many of the great trees wear long beards of lichen and moss, and drip with rain, and echo the calls of ravens and the liquid songs of hermit and Swainson’s thrushes.

Ecologists today call the Tongass the Amazon of America.

And for good reason. It’s under serious threat.

Profiles in Cowardice: EPA’s Abysmal Failure to Protect Children’s Health
Kathleen Rest, Union of Concerned Scientists Blog

Last month, having re-read Profiles in Courage by John Fitzgerald Kennedy, I found myself ruminating on the astounding lack of courage demonstrated by many of our elected leaders, their appointees, and other important stakeholders. (With a hat tip to Merriam-Webster) I defined cowardice as lacking the firmness of purpose to put the public interest first and foremost.

My first blog profiled the cowardly decision of several automakers who joined forces with President Trump in his war on clean cars and climate action. Today’s profile in cowardice
chronicles the shameful failure of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to protect children’s health from chlorpyrifos, a recognized neurotoxin.

My colleagues and I have reported on this sorry saga before (here, here), but given the grave threat chlorpyrifos poses to children’s health and the continued abject failure of the EPA to live up to its public health mission, it seems especially important to call out the cowardly and courageous in this story.