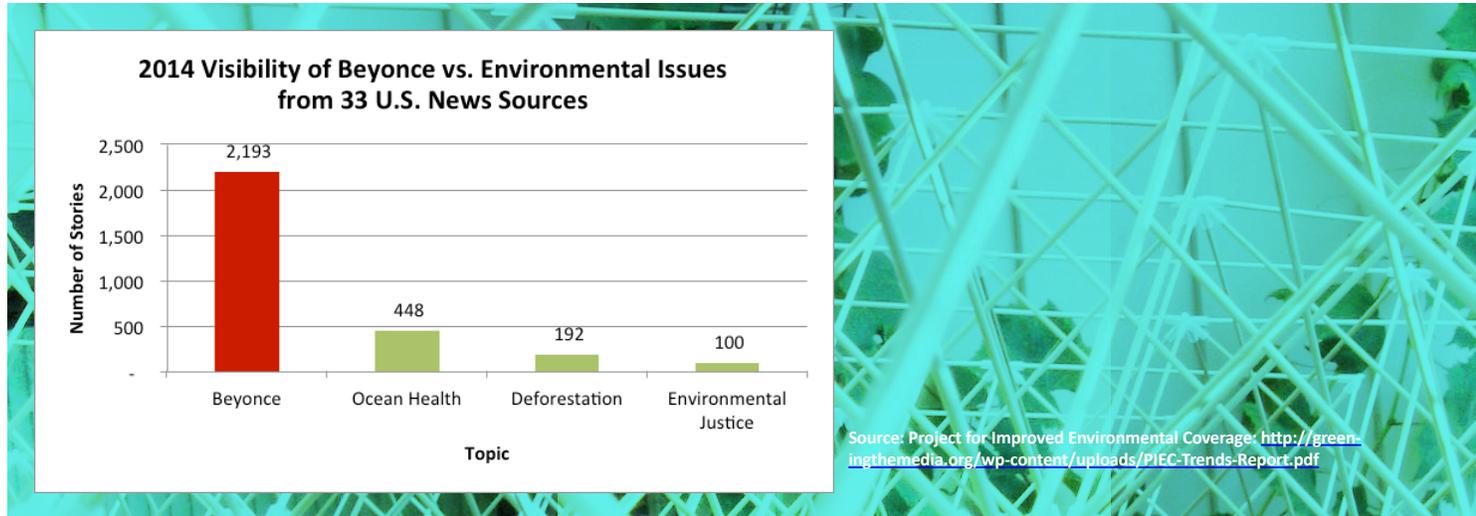


# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Environmental stories garner just 1 percent of headlines.<sup>1</sup> Industry consolidation and cost-cutting measures have virtually eliminated dedicated environmental reporters at the local level, and even many nationally focused news organizations have greatly reduced dedicated environmental staff in recent years, which has resulted in decreased coverage.<sup>2,3</sup>

## THE BUSINESS CASE FOR PRIORITIZING ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

While improved environmental coverage would benefit society by informing more people about environmental problems and solutions, there is also a strong business case for covering environmental issues in greater depth. Citizen-polling data reveals that the public wants more and better environmental coverage. A 2012 national poll conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation found that 79 percent of Americans believe news coverage of the environment should be improved.<sup>4</sup> Polling also suggests that most Americans are concerned about the environment. A Gallup poll from 2014 found that 66 percent of Americans worry about the environment either “a great deal” or “a fair amount.”<sup>5</sup> This was higher than the number of people who were concerned either “a great deal” or “a fair amount” about race relations, illegal immigration, drug use, or the possibility of a future terrorist attack in the United States—topics that are (justifiably, given their importance) frequently discussed in the news media. Additionally, millennials, a demographic many news organizations are trying to reach, are more concerned about the environment than older generations. A survey of millennials commissioned by Microsoft and the Clinton Global Initiative found that 76 percent of millennials say they are more focused on the environment than their parents’ generation.<sup>6</sup> While musicians, actors, and other celebrities are an important part of American culture and certainly warrant some media coverage, too often these stories dominate headlines at the expense of issues critical to the public interest such as the environment. Just one celebrity, Beyoncé, garnered more than eleven times more visibility than deforestation in 2014 from a combined thirty-three U.S. news organizations.



A survey of environmental professors, scientists, and other experts ranked issues on a scale of 1 to 10, with ten representing the most urgent need for society to address in the next ten years. In a separate study, the Project for Improved Environmental Coverage tracked the number of stories mentioning many of these issues across thirty-three U.S. news outlets. As can be seen in the table below, many issues that scientists and experts view as very important received very little coverage.

1 T. Miller & T. Pollak, “Environmental Coverage Ranking Report,” (2013) [www.environmentalcoverage.org/ranking](http://www.environmentalcoverage.org/ranking).

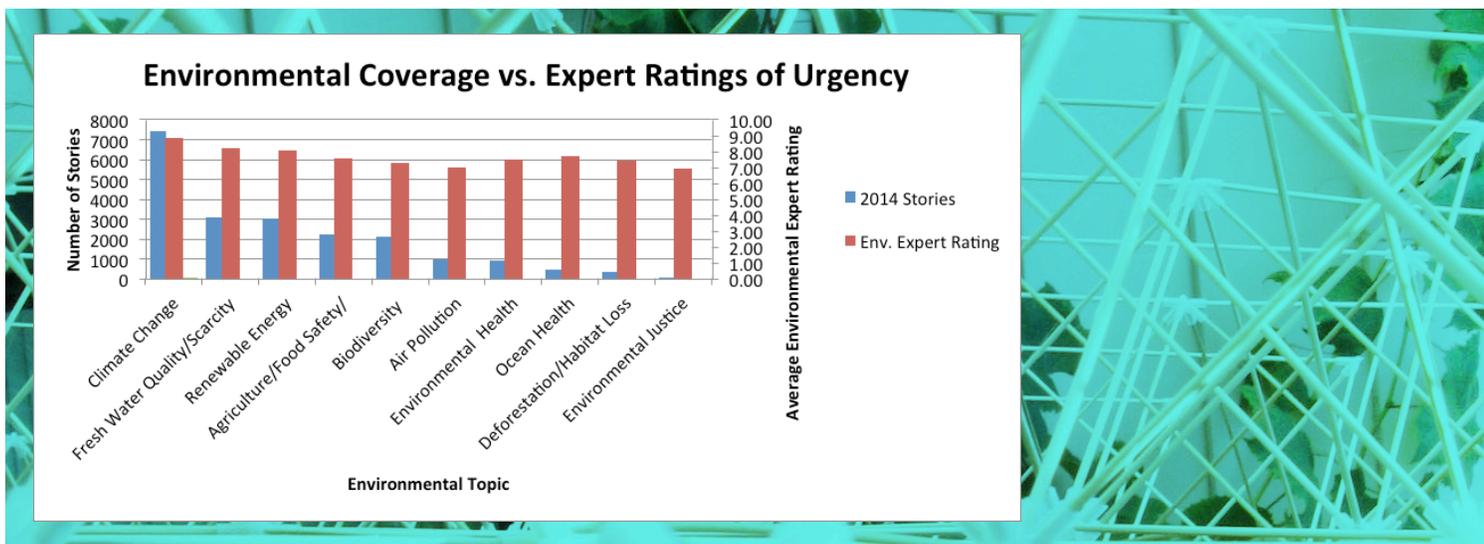
2 M. Sullivan, “After Changes, How Green is the Times?” *New York Times* (November 23, 2013) [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/24/public-editor/after-changes-how-green-is-the-times.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/24/public-editor/after-changes-how-green-is-the-times.html?_r=0).

3 K. Bagley, “NPR Reduces Its Environment Team to One,” *Inside Climate News*, (October 24, 2014) <http://insideclimatenews.org/news/20141024/npr-reduces-its-environment-team-one-reporter>.

4 Project for Improved Environmental Coverage. “Citizen Attitudes Regarding Environmental Coverage: Nearly 80% of Americans Believe News Coverage of the Environment Should Be Improved”. <http://environmentalcoverage.org/polling>

5 R. Riffken, “Climate Change Not a Top Worry in U.S.” Gallup (March 12, 2014) <http://www.gallup.com/poll/167843/climate-change-not-top-worry.aspx>.

6 J. C. Tim, “Millennials: We Care More About the Environment,” MSNBC (March 22, 2014) <http://www.msnbc.com/morning-joe/millennials-environment-climate-change>.



## STRUCTURING NEWS ORGANIZATIONS FOR STRONG ENVIRONMENTAL COVERAGE

The environment intersects with many other issues that are frequently covered in the news media, and it is important to include an environmental angle in these stories to help educate the public about the broad range of ways environmental issues impact their lives. There are many strategies that can be employed to achieve this goal including the following:

- **Employing dedicated environmental staff**
- **Partnering with news organizations specializing in environmental coverage**
- **Pooling resources with other news organizations to maximize depth and quality of coverage**
- **Having a dedicated environmental section or segment**
- **Including environmental stories with top headlines**
- **Integrating an environmental angle into stories focusing on other topics**
- **Curating content available from other sources**

A more in depth-discussion about structuring a news organization to ensure strong environmental coverage is available in the [Success Models for Strong Environmental Coverage](#) report.

## PARTNERSHIPS THAT CAN REDUCE COSTS AND IMPROVE ENVIRONMENTAL COVERAGE

While employing staff dedicated to an environmental beat is the best way to ensure adequate environmental coverage, there are opportunities to make smaller investments in environmental coverage that can result in high-quality reporting on the environment. Some models that have shown success include the following:

- **Resource Pooling**  
Both Climate Desk and a proposed project by the Society of Environmental Journalists involve multiple news organizations pooling funds to employ journalists focused on specific environmental issues or environmental issues in a specific region
- **Content Sharing**  
There are several examples of environmental news sources such as the Daily Climate and Environmental Health News that aggregate environmental stories and, in some cases, provide original content that can be used by other news organizations
- **Nonprofit Partnerships with Legacy Media**  
Partnerships between legacy news organizations and independent or nonprofit news organizations is another model that has shown success in bringing national attention to high-quality environmental reporting. Examples include a partnership between NBC and ProPublica with other nonprofit, public-interest-focused news organizations; a partnership between ABC and the Center for Public Integrity; and a partnership between the Weather Channel, Inside Climate News, and the Center for Public Integrity that resulted in an in-depth investigative report about the impacts of the oil and gas industry on communities in Texas.
- **University-Hosted Content**  
University-hosted content can be developed by any combination of students, professional staff, professors, and researchers. Such programs can also help in training the next generation of environmental reporters and can be scaled across regions and topic areas. Examples include Great Lakes Echo, Ensia, and Yale Environment 360.

## RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISTS

There are more resources available than ever before to help journalists and others in the news industry report on the environment. These resources include reports, frameworks and research to identify trends, success models, and opportunities to improve coverage, as well as issue briefs, webinars, and training programs for reporters that are focused on specific environmental issues. While there are many organizations providing these types of resources, a great starting point would be to explore those available from the [Project for Improved Environmental Coverage](#), the [Society of Environmental Journalists](#), and the [Metcalf Institute](#) and the [Institute for Journalism and Natural Resources](#).

## CONCLUSION

The news media is the leading source of information about the environment for most people, and decisions we all make from the products we buy to the representatives we elect have important implications for the environment we all depend on. Research shows that overall coverage of the environment is quite low, and some important issues are rarely mentioned. Better environmental coverage is essential for better public understanding of these important issues. These are important public-interest issues worthy of coverage, but beyond that, they are issues many are concerned about. The environment intersects with a broad range of other issues including the economy, national security, and politics, and it is an issue that younger generations are more concerned about. From this perspective, investing in greater environmental coverage not only fulfills the journalistic mission of reporting on issues critical to the public interest, but there is a strong case to be made that it should be an important component of any strategy to grow an audience and attract a younger generation of news consumers. There are many different models that have successfully resulted in high-quality environmental journalism, and there is a broad range of resources to help journalists reporting on the environment. We encourage those in the news industry to continue to explore these models and resources and to develop a plan to ensure adequate coverage of the environment. More details and a list of valuable resources are available in the full [Framework for Industry Innovation report available online here](#).

THESE ARE IMPORTANT PUBLIC-INTEREST ISSUES WORTHY OF COVERAGE, BUT BEYOND THAT, THEY ARE ISSUES MANY ARE CONCERNED ABOUT.