



grist

a beacon in the smog

ANNUAL REPORT 2010

*Can I recycle a
beer bottle with
a lime wedge
stuck inside?*

[yes!]



Laugh now —
or the planet
gets it.

Grist has been dishing out green news and commentary with a wry twist since 1999—which, to be frank, was way before most people cared about such things. As we celebrate a decade of online media success, we also find ourselves at a point in time that feels, well, freaky: traditional journalism is imploding, federal efforts to fight climate change are stalling, and the wave of green chatter online can leave people confused about how to move forward.

Grist has always been the one site people can count on to help make sense of it all, and now we consider that role to be more important than ever.

In this, our first official annual report, we spend a whole mess of time reflecting on the 10 years behind us. But even as we write this, we have our feet planted firmly in the present and our eyes fixed on the future. Across the country, individuals and communities are implementing real solutions that are moving us toward a more sustainable future. We are committed to spotlighting their work, so that we can continue to inspire and mobilize a new generation to make change.

Yep, it's true, we're positively drenched in hope—we can't help ourselves. But don't worry: we're still the irreverent Grist we've always been. Because of the many things this planet is running out of, sanctimonious tree-huggers ain't one.

Grist sets the agenda
by showing how green is
reshaping our world.
We cut through the noise
and empower a new
generation to make
change.

Big-time interviews: President(ial candidate) BARACK OBAMA

● Sen. JOHN McCAIN ● Sen. HILLARY CLINTON ● Vice President

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activist HELEN CALDICOTT ● German Green Party chair RENATE

KÜNSTAST ● author PAUL HAWKEN ● professional pranksters THE

YES MEN ● entrepreneur NELL NEWMAN ● Whole Foods CEO

JOHN MACKKEY ● environmental-justice activist MAJORA CARTER

● Duke Energy CEO JIM ROGERS ● biologist E. O. WILSON ●

New York Times columnist THOMAS FRIEDMAN ● and more ...



WOWZER. WHAT AN INCREDIBLE DECADE THIS has been. In 1999, wanting to awaken a new generation to concerns about the environment, I decided to launch a news digest, emailing it to about a hundred friends and family members. During a slap-happy all-nighter, a co-conspirator and I added punny headlines to the first round of stories, and Grist was born. We called it “gloom and doom with a sense of humor.”

We didn’t know then that Grist would become the leading platform for green news, analysis, and advice. We didn’t know that 10 years later, our non-profit news organization would boast a monthly audience of 800,000, or that syndication to partners including Yahoo!, *The Huffington Post*, YouTube, and *The Washington Post* would expand our reach to millions more. We didn’t know that email would be overtaken by even newer, more innovative ways to distribute our work, like RSS, Twitter, and Facebook.

Most of all, we didn’t know that Grist would revolutionize the environmental conversation.

Over the last 10 years, my staff and I have spent each day parsing the issues and helping our growing audience understand them. We have won awards and accolades for our work, including several Webbys, known as “the Oscars of the internet.” Grist’s unusual, irreverent approach to the news has earned coverage in other prominent U.S. and European media, including *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *The Guardian*, *Vanity Fair*, NBC, and PBS.

All this acclaim is appreciated, to be sure, but at Grist we have a deeper mission. We aim to shape the national conversation around climate and sustainability, engaging and mobilizing as many young people as we can. We’re using our patented “beacon in the smog” to highlight the innovators leading us to a cleaner, more sustainable future. As traditional journalism falters, the climate crisis grows ever more threatening, and federal climate legislation repeatedly tumbles, we are stepping up to point our audience to the stories that matter most, and give them the tools and inspiration they need to take action.

This is the first time we’ve produced an annual report (we feel so grown-up!). As we reflect on our first 10 years, we’re feeling a mix of pride at what we’ve accomplished and urgency about the challenges ahead. We wouldn’t have been able to come this far without the help of supporters like you. In particular, I want to acknowledge the tremendous generosity of Denis Hayes, the V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation, and the Kendeda Fund. Now it’s time to fire up the irrev-o-meter—a whole new decade awaits!

— Chip Giller, Founder and CEO

Grist is the *Colbert Report* of climate change, the *Daily Show* of deforestation, the *Oprah* of oil dependency—except with real reporting and analytical journalism.

Time magazine

Not that Grist isn't serious, but it tends not to be gloomy. They're not drinking the Kool-Aid—it's more of a chaser.

Felicity Barringer, *The New York Times*

Grist is reshaping green journalism by luring a younger and wider audience with an approach that's not so much dumbed down as smart-alecked up.

Outside magazine

watching Grist grow

AS THE MOTHER OF BOTH A TODDLER and adult children, I find I'm constantly thinking about the very different stages of life we all go through to become independent, successful people. Whether it's negotiating those first steps from coffee table to couch or negotiating that first apartment lease, each phase is significant—for us and for those who support us.

Now that Grist has turned ten, it's reached a new stage in its development as well, another benchmark in its incredible journey from upstart email news digest to dynamic online media platform. On behalf of the entire board, I offer warm congratulations (and maybe a small sigh of relief) to Grist on the successful completion of its first decade.

I've been involved with the organization from the beginning, first as an observer and volunteer, then as a board member, and most recently as board chair. And I've watched with growing pride as Grist has developed into a full-fledged, highly successful voice that's having a real influence on this country's conversations. That influence was confirmed in a very public way in 2009 when Chip Giller, who has been named a "Hero of the Environment" by *Time* magazine, received a prestigious Heinz Award.

Over the last year, the board and staff worked together to develop a strategic plan that will see us into the next decade, and we reconfirmed the vital importance of our mission: informing, engaging, and activating the next generation. We have also found ways to remain innovative and flexible (and undaunted) in the face of the troubled economy.

And what an important time it is to have Grist's smarts and humor in the mix. Traditional journalism is faltering, even as the need for strong reporting grows. The public's green fetish is waning, just when we need the most allies. In climate change, we face an enormous threat, but also an enormous opportunity: a chance to build a sustainable future, one that is wise, healthy, and clean. Grist, exercising a visionary outlook that has served it well since its beginnings, is committed to reporting on that future, and inspiring people to make—and demand—real change.

As a board chair and as a long-time fan, nothing could make me happier than that. And I didn't even have to change any diapers along the way.

— Susan L. Kaufman, Board Chair

Hey, Poachers,
Leave Those
Squids Alone

[punny headlines we're
very proud of]

It Takes a Pillage
to Raze the
Wild

I Can't Believe I Ate
the Coal Thing

How Do You Solve
a Problem Like
Malaria?

a timeline

1999 GRIST LAUNCHES!

Environmental news summaries with punny headlines emailed to 100 people ■ Founder Chip Giller and sprawling staff of 1.5 begin churning out Daily Grist. Word spreads

2000 Grist's inaugural April Fool's Day edition includes items on Pamela Anderson hosting an Earth Day event and Ford unveiling a "Mastodon" SUV. A gullible (and later miffed) *USA Today* columnist repeats some of the stories as fact ■ Ten days before the presidential election, Grist

reports that the Gore campaign has begun to try to lure environmental voters back from the Nader camp. Headline: "Woo Is Me" ■ By the end of the year, subscriptions to Daily Grist have reached 30,000

2001 In the wake of Sept. 11, Grist reports on accusations that "eco-terrorists" planned the attacks ■ Chip Giller named a "New Media Hero" by AlterNet ■ Skepticism rules the day as Grist takes a skeptical look at Mr. Skeptic himself, Bjorn Lomborg

2002 Ask Umbra advice column debuts, answering questions on chemtrails and fish farming ■ "Power Shift" special series explores local efforts to combat global climate change

2003 Grist spins off from the Earth Day Network, becoming its own entity ■ Staffers eat only grapefruit for two weeks to raise money to hire a new writer

■ Grist wins Utne Independent Press Award for Online Political Coverage ■ Monthly audience size = 100,000, staff size = 5

2004 Grist wins Lehman Award for Excellence in Public Advocacy from the Tides Foundation ■ Red Sox win first World Series since 1918! Founder Chip Giller openly weeps

■ Grist conducts interviews with leading presidential candidates ■ Grist debuts a blog ■ Monthly audience size = 200,000, staff size = 12

2005 Grist hosts "Death of Environmentalism" debate. Fisticuffs ensue ■ Grist launches Grist List, a weekly round-up of weird and wonderful green things

■ Grist wins "People's Choice" Webby award, known as the Oscars of the internet ■ Monthly audience reaches 500,000

2006 Seminal "Poverty and the Environment" series earns widespread acclaim ■ Popular food section gets its official start with debut of "Virtual Reality" column ■ Grist wins second consecutive "People's Choice" Webby award, Utne Independent Press Award for Online Political Coverage and conservation achievement award from the National Wildlife Federation. What a haul!

■ Giller appears in *Vanity Fair* green issue, much to staff's amusement

2007 Grist publishes first book, *Wake Up and Smell the Planet* ■ Giller named Hero of the Environment by *Time* magazine ■ Grist editors give eco-advice on NBC's *Today* show. Meredith Vieira smiles politely

2008 April Fool's Daily Grist says Gore has at long last tossed hat in presidential ring, exciting believers far and wide (and pissing them off mightily when truth is revealed) ■ Grist interviews all leading presidential candidates, including Obama and McCain

■ *Wake Up and Smell the Planet* wins silver medal at Independent Publisher Book Awards

2009 For Valentine's Day, Ask Umbra films a musical about non-toxic sex toys ■ To celebrate 10th anniversary, Grist launches a redesigned site (and gorges on cake) ■ Monthly audience hits 800,000, syndication reaches millions more ■

Grist at 10

IT WAS THE YEAR OF THE OX, and, hooboy, did Grist pay tribute to that hardworking animal as we marked our 10th anniversary. From relaunching our entire site to reporting on the Copenhagen climate conference, from running a savvy “Screw Earth Day” campaign to ramping up the daily news and analysis our audience has come to depend on, we made it a year to remember. Here are 10 of our favorite highlights:

10 WE INSPIRED ACTION. Our 2009 reader survey showed that 84 percent of respondents had changed an action or behavior in the past year based on Grist content. Nearly half said they weren’t otherwise affiliated with green groups. With a monthly audience of 800,000 and an even broader reach through syndication, we’re leading to real change on the ground.

9 WE GAVE OURSELVES A FACELIFT. A major revamp of our website has allowed users to become more informed while connecting with like-minded people and learning how to make a difference. Dynamic, multi-pronged, socially networked, and full of the meaty coverage readers have come to expect, the site saw record-high traffic within days, which has kept on climbing.

8 WE SCORED THESENATORS. Hot on the heels of our comprehensive campaign package in late 2008, we kept our political nose to the grindstone (ouch!). As part of Climate Citizens, a project intended to hold politicians accountable on climate change, we produced a report card grading senators on the transparency of their climate and energy positions. Fifty-three percent scored a C or worse. Wondering if we were objective? Climate denier James Inhofe (R-Okla.) scored an A!

7 WE SCREWED EARTH DAY. Our savvy Screw Earth Day campaign poked fun at the tokenism of this eco-holiday and offered Grist as a tool for greening everyday life. Nearly 250 media outlets—including *Newsweek*, *Rolling*

Stone, *The Washington Post*, *U.S. News*, *Chicago Tribune*, and public radio's *Marketplace*—reported on the campaign, which successfully attracted thousands of new registrants to our site.

6 WE TWEETED OUR HEADS OFF. Grist ramped up its presence on social networking sites, starting Twitter feeds that are earning thousands of followers, creating a Facebook application called Hot Dish that encouraged students to get involved in the climate fight, and sharing our stories (and encouraging readers to share them) through sites like Digg and Stumbleupon. We increased referral traffic from social networks to Grist by 66 percent from Oct. 2008 to Sept. 2009, and increased our fans and followers on social networking sites by 57 percent during the same time.

5 WE UPPED THE ANTE. On the fundraising front, we launched two successful and fast-growing new programs: Beacon in the Smog, for major donors, and Friends with Benefits, a membership program for those who give at lower levels. Thanks to these new programs, individual giving soared from 13 percent to 22 percent of our total income.

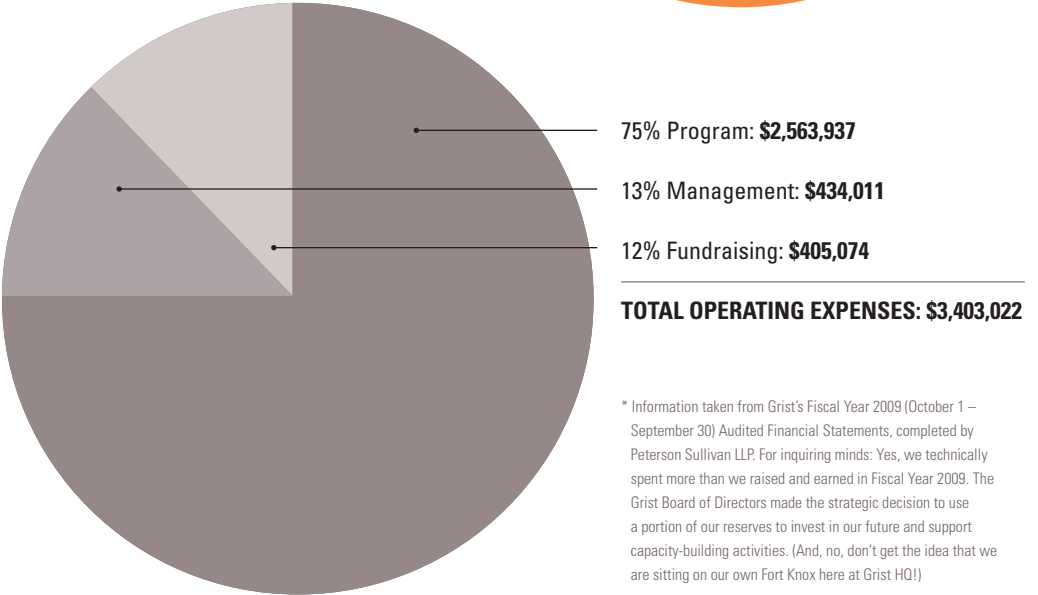
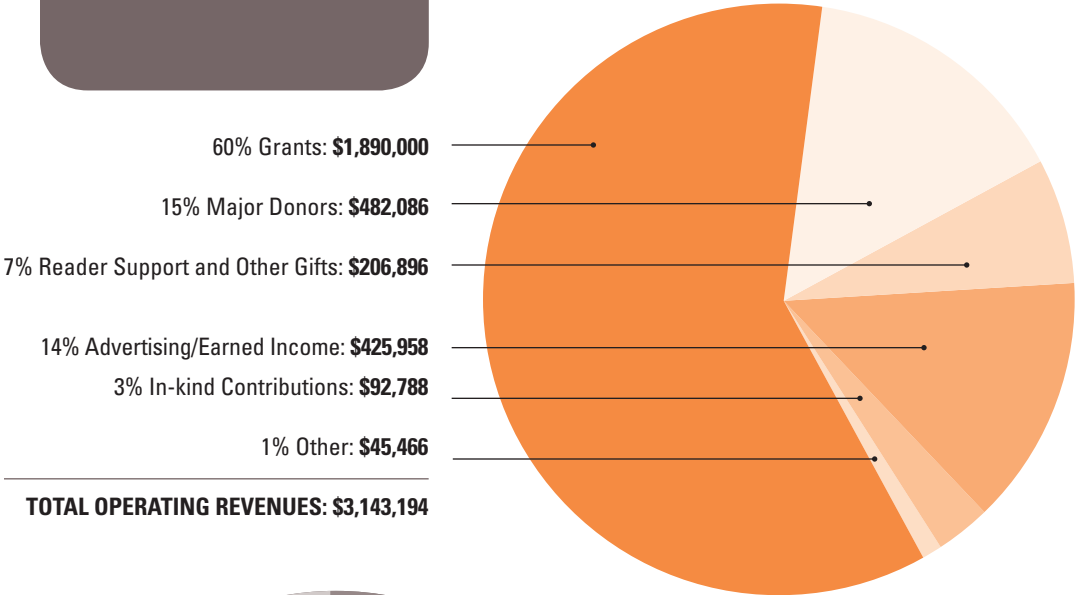
4 WE MADE FRIENDS. Grist held events for readers across the country, in Boston, New York, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco. We met hundreds of entrepreneurs, engineers, wonkheads, writers, and others—even two former Grist interns who are happily pursuing a green life together in Oregon!

3 WE GOT NOTICED. Media coverage ranged from *USA Today* to *Budget Travel* to MSNBC, and founder Chip Giller was honored with a prestigious Heinz Award from Teresa Heinz and her family foundation. Heinz said Giller “has taken traditional environmental journalism and turned it on its head. He has injected environmental reporting with irreverence and wit, yet without compromising depth and accuracy. At a time of declining journalistic budgets and standards, Mr. Giller has established Grist as a serious source of independent content and analysis that makes environmental issues relevant to a new and broad audience.”

2 WE GOT STRATEGY. There were meetings, there were brainstorming sessions, there were PowerPoints and breakout sessions. And eventually, they added up to a strikingly handsome three-year business plan that will carry us forward.

1 WE KEPT OUR BEACON BURNING. In a universe where apps and fads come and go (and where traditional news outlets are folding like lawn chairs), Grist remains a beacon in the smog for those who want to build a better world. Each day, we produce the news, analysis, and advice you need. This year alone, we covered coal-plant protests, drew connections between swine flu and factory farming, followed landmark climate legislation, introduced the latest green-tech gadgets, reported on the White House's organic garden, picked apart media efforts to refute sound climate science, traveled to Copenhagen to produce a multimedia package on the climate conference, gave tips for green weddings and child-rearing, and more ... and more ... and more. Our beacon burns bright all day and night—good thing it's solar-powered.

Grist
2009
financials*



* Information taken from Grist's Fiscal Year 2009 (October 1 – September 30) Audited Financial Statements, completed by Peterson Sullivan LLP. For inquiring minds: Yes, we technically spent more than we raised and earned in Fiscal Year 2009. The Grist Board of Directors made the strategic decision to use a portion of our reserves to invest in our future and support capacity-building activities. (And, no, don't get the idea that we are sitting on our own Fort Knox here at Grist HQ!)

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Grist is beyond grateful to the leagues of supporters who make our work possible. We are proud to acknowledge the generous contributions of the following individuals, foundations, corporations, and other organizations during fiscal year 2009. Although space constraints prevent us from listing the thousands upon thousands of gifts we receive from our individual readers every year, we swoon when we think about them. Thank you all!

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*I love Grist!
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money?*

— Ann, Grist reader

[Hmm, we need to think about that one ... oh, OK!
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