The Bill Lane Center for the American West is pleased to announce that Jon Christensen will become the Center’s Executive Director beginning September 1, 2009. Christensen will succeed Tammy Frisby, who has held the position since 2007.

The Bill Lane Center for the American West is an interdisciplinary research and teaching institute founded in 2002 and named in 2005 in honor of Bill Lane, the retired co-chairman of the board of Lane Publishing Company, longtime publisher of Sunset magazine, and former United States Ambassador to Australia and Nauru.

The Center is dedicated to advancing scholarly and public understanding of the West’s past, present, and future. It supports research, teaching, and reporting about land and life in the western half of the continent, including the trans-Mississippi United States, Canada west of Ontario, and all of Mexico. Current research programs address issues of western water supply and management, California constitutional reform, and the social, economic, environmental, and cultural status of the rural West. The Center also sponsors both undergraduate and graduate courses concerning the region, offers student internships as well as research fellowships for visiting scholars and journalists, and organizes lectures, conferences, symposia, media programming, and continuing education programs aimed at a broad public audience.

The Executive Director is the Center’s chief operational, strategic, and development officer, reporting to the Center’s Faculty Directors, David M. Kennedy and Richard White, both in the History Department.

Christensen brings to the executive directorship a deep interest in the West cultivated in his 21 years as an environmental journalist and science writer. His work has appeared in The New York Times, the western regional newspaper High Country News, and many other newspapers, magazines, journals, and public radio and television shows. He was a Knight Professional Journalism Fellow at Stanford in 2002-2003 and a Steinbeck Fellow at San Jose State University in 2003-2004. He is now finishing his Ph.D. in the Department of History at Stanford and has served as Associate Director of the Spatial History Project under the auspices of the Bill Lane Center. His dissertation, “Critical Habitat,” is a history of ideas, narratives, science, land use change, conservation practices, and the extinction of a species – the Bay checkerspot butterfly -- in time and space. His broader research and teaching interests include environmental history, natural history, and the history of the biological and ecological sciences, climate change, conservation, and journalism.

Richard White, Christensen’s principal dissertation adviser, said that “Christensen brings to the Bill Lane Center a deep personal familiarity with the West, two decades of experience as a journalist reporting on the region, its environment, and its people, and a scholarly interest in both its past and its future. With his interests in history, public policy, and the contemporary West and its people, he is a perfect fit for the Bill Lane Center.” Kennedy added that “Jon’s creativity and energy, his deep roots in the West and his passion for its landscapes and its fate constitute a fine match with the Bill Lane Center’s mission. We look forward to his long and productive tenure as Executive Director.”

For more information about the Bill Lane Center for the American West visit: http://west.stanford.edu