

THE MORAL LIBERAL

“How Climate Change Is Hurting School Spirit”—They’re Kidding, Right?

Paul C. “Chip Knappenberger

The latest from the National Wildlife Federation has to rank among the most absurd global warming reports I have encountered. And, after 30 years of encountering all sorts of wacky warming hype, this is saying a lot.

This NWF doozey is entitled “Mascot Madness: How Climate Change is Hurting School Spirit” and was timed so as to try to take advantage of the pre-coverage of the upcoming March Madness—the popular annual NCAA college basketball tournament. Apparently linking climate change to negative impacts on sports is a new green tactic.

The NWF’s premise is that human-caused global warming is threatening the natural version of school mascots, and, in some cases, causing them to be dissociated from the region that includes the university that they represent, presumably dampening “school spirit.”

The NWF offered up its solution to this vexing problem:

- Passing effective laws that reduce carbon pollution and other air pollutants that drive climate change and endanger the health of our communities and wildlife.
- Investing in clean, wildlife-friendly, renewable energy sources to replace our dangerous dependence on dirty fossil fuels.
- Practicing “climate-smart conservation” by taking climate change into account in our wildlife and natural resource management efforts.

Of course.

Even if it were true that anthropogenic climate change could be scientifically linked to changes in the location and/or health of the various school mascot species—which it almost certainly can’t—how this impacts “school spirit” is completely beyond me.

If the real-world situation that the mascots find themselves in is reflected in school spirit, can you imagine the level of dejection in the fan base of say the San Diego State Aztecs, the University of Southern California Trojans, the University of Calgary Dinos, or the Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne Mastodons? It is a wonder that a single seat is filled for home games.

And as to the relationship between the natural territory of the mascot and the degree of rah-rahness, consider what must be the struggle facing the booster clubs behind the UC Irvine

Anteaters, the Pittsburg (Kansas) State Gorillas, the Youngstown State Penguins, or the University of Missouri-Kansas City Kangaroos. Global warming's impact is small beans compared to this kind of territorial displacement!

The NWF draws special attention to the worrisome case of the rivalry between the University of Michigan Wolverines and the Ohio State Buckeyes, fretting that climate change is driving the wolverine out of the state of Michigan while simultaneously driving the buckeye tree into Michigan (and out of Ohio).

But, according to this webpage from the University of Michigan athletic association, how the University's mascot became the Wolverines is a matter of some debate. Interestingly, the page goes on to note that an actual wolverine has never been captured in the state of Michigan, and the first verified sighting of one didn't occur until 2004!

And a quick peak at the USDA Plant Guide indicates that distribution of the Ohio buckeye tree shows that while the tree may extend its natural boundary northward in a warming climate, there is still plenty of territory south of Ohio to keep the tree in the state for a long time to come. So, everyone (including the NWF) can rest assured that climate change will not serve to lessen the Michigan/Ohio state rivalry.

In keeping with the ringing the global warming alarm bells, I am a bit surprised that the NWF didn't compile a companion report titled "Mascot Madness: How Climate Change is Boosting School Spirit to Unhealthy Levels." In that report, they could have featured the Miami Hurricanes, the University of British Columbia-Okanagan Heat, the Geneva College Golden Tornadoes, the Southeastern Oklahoma Savage Storm, and, of course, the most obvious of all, the Dartmouth College Big Greens.