

# Planet Jackson Hole

## Climate Cowboys Part II

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JACKSON, WYO – Part II: Wyoming’s coal wealth dictates greenhouse gas solutions

Despite mounting scientific evidence, climate change is hardly settled science in Wyoming.

Free-market Libertarians remain highly skeptical, questioning the validity of human-caused climate alterations, dismissing such data as politically and financially driven. It is not surprising then, that the third National Climate Assessment, released by the White House last Tuesday, sparked immediate heated debate in the state.

“Once again, President Obama is pushing an extreme agenda of burdensome regulations that will put more Americans out of work,” wrote Wyoming Senator John Barrasso – R, in USA Today, adding, “The president should work with Congress on legislation to help us make energy as clean as we can, as fast as we can — without putting more Americans in the unemployment line.”

As the nation’s largest coal producer, Wyoming is threatened by proposed EPA regulations aimed at reducing carbon emissions from coal combustion – the primary climate change culprit identified in the NCA report.

“The EPA continues to stretch its interpretation of its authority under the Clean Air Act. ... This proposed regulation will adversely impact Wyoming’s economy as the leading coal supplier to the United States,” Wyoming Governor Matt Mead wrote in a letter to EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy on Friday, asking her to withdraw the agency’s proposed “greenhouse gas rule,” due out in June.

It’s about the carbon

The White House describes the new NCA report as the “most authoritative and comprehensive source of scientific information to date about climate-change impacts – across all U.S. regions and on critical sectors of the economy.” Though nationally limited in scope, the NCA report echoes the International Panel on Climate Change’s urgent warnings about human-caused carbon dioxide emissions. IPCC’s third and final report was leaked to the press last month.

Similar to the findings of IPCC, the NCA report concludes, “evidence of human-induced climate change continues to strengthen, and ... impacts are increasing across the country.” It also notes that temperatures between 2001 and 2012 were warmer than any previous decade in every U.S. region. The NCA report emphasizes, “Climate change presents a major challenge for society.”

According to the White House, the NCA report “confirms that climate change is not a distant threat — it’s affecting us now,” and underscores “the need for the American people to prepare for and respond to its far-reaching implications.” That means reducing emissions from coal, Wyoming’s bread and butter.

The NCA report analyzed climate change impacts upon seven sectors of society – human health, water, energy, transportation, agriculture, forests, and ecosystems – assessing key impacts regionally across the country, including: Northeast, Southeast and Caribbean, Midwest, Great Plains, Southwest, Northwest, Alaska, Hawai‘i and Pacific Islands, focusing also on coastal areas, oceans, and marine resources.

Produced by a team of nearly 300 experts, guided by a 60-member Federal Advisory Committee, the report was reviewed by the public and other experts, including federal agencies and a panel of the National Academy of Sciences, according to the official NCA website.

“Observations unequivocally show that climate is changing and that the warming of the past 50 years is primarily due to human-induced emissions of heat-trapping gases,” the NCA report states. “These emissions come mainly from burning coal, oil, and gas, with additional contributions from forest clearing and some agricultural practices,” it concludes. Not everyone is convinced this is true, however.

#### Climate clashing

“The Obama Administration’s ... National Climate Assessment report leaves the impression that if we don’t quickly launch into action to reduce our emissions of greenhouse gases (primarily by shifting away from using fossil fuels), we will be inundated by an endless flow of misfortune unleashed by the ensuing climate change. ... Nothing could be further from the truth,” wrote Paul C. “Chip” Knappenberger in a Washington Times article last week.

Knappenberger is assistant director of the Cato Institute’s Center for the Study of Science. The Cato Institute is a public policy research organization, “dedicated to the principles of individual liberty, limited government, free markets, and peace.”

“I agree with Knappenberger 100 percent,” said Maureen Bader, economist for the Wyoming Liberty Group. “If you don’t get people really excited about sudden catastrophic change, then the scientists won’t get the funding,” Bader said. WLG was founded in 2008 as “a venue for understanding public issues in light of constitutional principles and governmental accountability.”

Referring to both the IPCC and NCA reports, Bader said, “These are alarmist documents designed to suit political agendas. It’s funding, it’s all about money. Look at these organizations [NASA, NOAA, etc.] – they’re government funded.”

There’s always environmental alarmism, according to Bader. “It was all about global cooling in the 70s and that didn’t happen. Now it’s global warming Armageddon, and that’s not going to happen either,” Bader said. “What’s gonna happen next? People realize it’s all just a bunch of nonsense.”

These views reflect those of the State of Wyoming. Against the unanimous recommendation of some 30 Wyoming educators and school administrators, in March Mead approved a legislative budget amendment preventing state funding of Next Generation Science Standards that treat climate change as fact. In 2010 during his initial bid for governor, Mead foreshadowed, “I am unconvinced that climate change is man-made, but I do recognize we may face challenges presented by those who propose and believe they can change our climate by law with ill-thought-out policy.”

“You can’t fool adults, but you can indoctrinate children,” Bader said, adding, “That’s why they want to put this in schools now – it was good that the legislators in Wyoming defunded the NGSS.”

“Of course the climate changes – it always has and it always will,” she added. “The question is how much will a miniscule amount of CO<sub>2</sub> created by man’s activity actually affect climate?”

Bader argues that the sun and other natural factors are causing climate change, and contradicts the science in the IPCC and NCA reports, arguing global warming has stalled over the past 17 years.

“When people work for an organization that is getting a lot of government funding to study global warming, the last thing a scientist will do is speak out against global warming,” Bader said, “If they do they could lose their job.”

Bader points to former NASA atmospheric scientist Dr. Joanne Simpson, describing her as the first woman in the world to receive a PhD in meteorology, author of more than 190 studies and among the most preeminent scientists of the last 100 years. Bader quotes Simpson: “Since I am no longer affiliated with any organization nor receiving any funding, I can speak quite frankly. As a scientist I remain skeptical . . . The main basis of the claim that man’s release of greenhouse gases is the cause of the warming is based almost entirely upon climate models. We all know the frailty of models concerning the air-surface system.”

NASA, however, is not skeptical about the mathematical models or the science, stating that 97 percent of the world’s scientists agree human-caused greenhouse gas emissions are rapidly accelerating global climate change.

#### NCA predictions

Sophisticated technological improvements have advanced climate science significantly in recent years.

Accumulated evidence gathered and analyzed by independent research groups from around the world extends records of observed trends in temperature, precipitation, sea level, ice mass, and many other variables, confirming earlier predictions. Factors such as sea level rise and Arctic sea ice decline, however, have outpaced earlier projections, according to the NCA report.

Extensive data purports natural factors – like the sun – could not have caused the warming observed over the past 50 years. Highly accurate satellite sensors measured but found no overall

increase in the sun's output during the past half century, for example. NCA determined that multiple lines of independent evidence confirm that human activities have added to the atmospheric burden of heat-trapping gases – “greenhouse gases” – that have caused most of Earth's warming over the past half century.

In Wyoming, the NCA report predicts significant anticipated climate-related challenges, such as increasing competition for natural resources; maintaining sustainable agriculture; conserving ecological systems; and enhancing a community's resilience to climate extremes. As snow and plant species diminish and habitats shift, wildlife, hunting, fishing and cold-weather recreation and tourism will be adversely affected, according to the report.

Rural America already experiences climate change-related weather effects, including crop and livestock loss, severe drought and flooding, damage to levees and roads from extreme storms, shifts in planting and harvesting times, and large-scale losses from fires and other weather-related disasters, according to the report.

Considerable wildlife mortality and distress occurred during the region's worst drought in 500 years, from 1998 through 2003, for example.

Pine bark beetles not kept in check by cold are decimating mature pine forests and dependent species, such as boreal owls, which hunt largely in mature forests. Snowshoe hare, lynx and other predators also will decline for 10 to 15 years until lodgepole forests regenerate. At least 37 undesirable invasive species of fish, amphibians, plants, insects, and diseases are expected to increase their ranges in the United States as a result of climate change.

Early snowmelt indicates an active fire season. Wildfire activity increased 400 percent from 1987 through 2003, compared to the previous 16 years (1970-1986), Worldwatch reports. Fires burned on average one to five weeks longer. Predictions estimate areas burned will double by 2100, hitting Montana, Wyoming, Utah, and New Mexico particularly hard. Costs already exceed \$1 billion per season in the Rocky Mountain West alone. Worldwatch reports Western forests account for 20 to 40 percent of our nation's carbon sequestration, but if destroyed by fires, instead of functioning as carbon sinks, burned forests may become net carbon dioxide emitters.

#### Climate brinkmanship

“Whether skeptical or not about climate change, I'm not skeptical about what the market's doing,” Mead said in a March press conference in Jackson Hole. “We need solutions, particularly for coal.”

Rep. Keith Gingery, R – Jackson, believes climate conversations need to shift focus. “Litmus tests don't work,” he said, “Once you ask, ‘are you for this or against that,’ all progress stops. When we worked to get a big bill through on carbon sequestration – a means by which coal emissions are buried underground – we began with ‘it doesn't matter whether you believe in global warming – it matters how we position Wyoming,’” Gingery explained.

“Change the dynamic of the conversation,” Gingery advised. For example, “Instead of talking about climate change, talk about how we should make our buildings more efficient so we can save our school district money.”

“My impetus is to get things done, and I think my record speaks for itself,” Gingery said, noting that he tried doing a bill years ago that would require all state buildings to be LEED certified, and he “just got eaten alive.” LEED, or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a green building certification program that recognizes best-in-class building strategies and practices aimed at energy conservation and efficiency.

Gingery also recalled spending a lot of time debating the legal rights of wind. “Can people sue other people for stealing wind?” he said.

“Wyoming gets a lot of bad press, but I think most people are cognizant of the fact that coal and fossil fuels pay our bills. Still, we’re doing things here,” Gingery said, noting, “We were the first state to get the companies to disclose what’s in fracking fluids.” Gingery believes things are moving forward and the conservation conversation just needs to continue in a way that works for Wyoming.