

April 10, 2009

PSO Pileated
c/o Margaret hgbee
3119 Creekside Road
Indiana, PA 15701-7934

Dear Ms. Higbee:

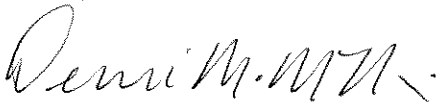
Tom Dick brought to my attention the commentary by Sam Sinderson in the March issue of The Pileated regarding global climate change. I prepared the attached response to Dr. Sinderson's comments. Tom, Ed Perry and Mark Henry have all read them and concur with my analysis.

Tom and I are both founding members and officers of the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society. Tom is a retired veterinarian, and prominent member of the Pennsylvania Society of Ornithologists whose ecological contributions and credentials are well known to you. Since 1980 I have been a biology professor at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown where I've taught ecology and done ecological research. I have an A.B. from Whitman College in Biology, and an MA and PhD from Southern Illinois University in Zoology. Ed Perry is a biologist retired from the US Fish and Wildlife Service who is now Pennsylvania Outreach Coordinator for the National Wildlife Federation on global warming. He has a master's degree in Biology from The Ohio State University. Mark S. Henry is also a member of the Pennsylvania Society of Ornithologists.

We respectfully request that the attached letter be published in the next issue of The Pileated. As an official publication of the PSO, an influential organization reaching many prominent members of the ornithological community, your newsletter should accept the obligation to inform its readers responsibly about important ecological issues in light of general scientific consensus, rather than through benighted opinions of individual members no matter how well respected they might be as individuals. I believe you will find that my comments represent the consensus of the scientific community, with verifiable citations to respected sources. Please publish our response.

If you need further information on this topic, on our comments, or on our credentials, feel free to contact me. Thank you.

Sincerely,



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We are very disappointed that the PSO Pileated chose to publish Sam Sinderson's objection to the letter by National Audubon Society's John Flicker urging President Obama to support action that will slow and reverse climate change. That climate change is occurring and is caused by human activity is nearly universally accepted by the scientific community. All respectable scientific organizations in the United States, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the National Academy of Science, the American Meteorological Society, the American Geophysical Union, the American Physical Society, the Union of Concerned Scientists, and Sigma Xi, have publicly acknowledged the incontrovertible evidence of this impending crisis and its human cause. The international scientific community concurs, as demonstrated in the 2007 report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The only argument remaining among responsible scientists and policy makers is not whether it is happening but how rapidly change is occurring and how much (or little) time we have to act to avert catastrophe on a global scale. Economic arguments regarding the reduction of fossil fuel use and generation of greenhouse gasses routinely show the benefits to far outweigh costs in both the near term and the long term. These are consensus decisions based on evidence, not politically motivated conspiracies or contrarian diatribes. Only schemes favoring short term profits for individual corporations or local economies and ignoring exploitation and poverty on a global scale can support any sort of business-as-usual scenario.

Dr. Sinderson uses arguments that are misleading, fallacious or demonstrably false in support of his position and cites "experts" who are discredited when he bothers to cite any authority at all. In some cases he simply makes unsupported statements or associates factors that do not belong together. The statement that it is "now well known that the earth has cooled over the last ten years" is made without offering any data. This unfounded assertion is refuted by data available for public scrutiny at NASA's Global Change Master Directory (www.gcmd.nasa.gov), the US Environmental Protection Agency (www.epa.gov/climatechange/index.html) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change data center (<http://www.ipcc-data.org/>). In fact 9 of the last 10 years have been the hottest since records of global temperatures have been computed. He cites objections raised by Dr. David Evans, a mathematician (not a climatologist) in *The Australian*, a newspaper (not a refereed journal) that posit the absence of a tropical hot spot as proof that global warming has not occurred. This supposedly refutes the massive data collected by legitimate climatology research scientists and organizations and published in peer reviewed scientific literature. Sinderson then proceeds to call those with whom he disagrees "alarmists," presumably because they disagree with him. He gives no scientific reason. Name calling is not scientific refutation. Science is based upon data, not opinion. The scientists cite data from NASA that the sun has been radiating less energy in Earth's direction recently, but Earth's atmosphere has nonetheless been warming. That anomaly is used by Evans as evidence against the climatologists, even though their models correctly attribute Earth's warming to atmospheric greenhouse gases overwhelming the cooling effects of reduced solar radiation.

Next Sinderson cites the irrepressible Siegfried Frederick Singer, an 85-year-old self-proclaimed climate change skeptic who was once a college professor, physicist and consultant to the space program. Singer has been publishing books and articles outside the mainstream scientific community, and often over their objections, stating that climate change is a hoax. His conflict of interest is well established; the institute which he established and of which he is president, the Science & Environment Policy Project, have been supported primarily by the fossil fuel industry. Singer often proclaims himself a martyr, but in fact he is an unapologetic shill for coal and oil interests, as a small amount of investigation soon corroborates. If we were to simply attack Dr. Singer because we didn't like what he stands for – as he and others often do regarding prominent climate change spokesmen such as Dr. James Hansen of NASA and former Vice President Al Gore – it would represent what logicians call an *ad hominem* argument. Such arguments are aimed solely at the person making a statement, thus deflecting the attention of the reader from the principle which is being contended. Instead we criticize Singer's objectivity and his unswerving allegiance to positions that serve his personal economic interests. Singer's coauthor for the book cited by Sinderson is Dennis Avery, an employee of The Heartland Institute, a rightwing think tank supported mainly by the tobacco and oil industries. Heartland coincidentally strongly opposes regulation of tobacco and fossil fuels and denies any links between those products and damage to health or the environment

(http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Heartland_Institute#Exxon_funding).

A legitimate climatologist cited by Dr. Sinderson is Henrik Svensmark who contends that some of the increase in global warming is caused by the sun's influence on cloud formation. Dr. Svensmark does not attempt to refute the damage being done or yet to be caused by global warming or of other causes contribution to climate change by greenhouse gases, but simply proposes an additional cause. His proposed source of warming is one human activity cannot influence, whereas the warming caused by greenhouse gases is at least partly within our control. (The coauthor of his book, Nigel Calder, is a hired ghost writer having no particular scientific credentials.)

Next Sinderson uses guilt by association, suggesting that research scientists are either addicted to government grants or are furthering a nefarious socialist agenda. Since most noncontroversial large-scale research, ranging from cancer cures to technology transfer, is ultimately government sponsored and has been since the end of World War II, accepting support from such entities as NSF and NIH can hardly be construed as illegitimate. Making "socialist" a slur is an unworthy propaganda technique. In the same paragraph, Sinderson lumps together "oil, coal, natural gas and nuclear energy." Nuclear energy is, of course, being proposed as a possible solution to our fossil fuel addiction by many who fear the consequences of global warming.

Finally Sinderson proposes that we use fossil fuels to augment our economy in order to enrich ourselves further while developing alternative energy sources. Of course the sophisticated models that now predict that climate change is likely to cause widespread human suffering, starvation, flooding of coastal cities and the like, also warn that further greenhouse gases produced by continued fossil fuel use will simply squander any economic benefits we might generate. If we continue our profligate fossil fuel use until reserves become scarce, it's likely that we will further exacerbate the economic and social disparities that are already driving global disruptions and conflicts. We will thus be adversely affecting the world's most fortunate societies rather than endowing them with the benefits of our forward looking solutions and models of our thoughtful restraint. The window of opportunity within which we might provide a beneficial legacy is narrowing. Commentaries such as Dr. Sinderson's serve only to reduce the likelihood that we will act in the best interest of the planet and all of our descendents in a timely enough fashion to do any good.

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