

#SNOWPROS



DISTURBING UNCERTAINTY IN SNOW COUNTRY: AN ESSAY ON CLIMATE CHANGE

By Chris Fellows

Persistent, low-level uneasiness crept into my psyche over the last couple of seasons. I can't put my finger on the exact reasons for it, but many people I work with feel the same thing. Climate change serves as the obvious and most popular explanation for our aggregate angst; the snowfall we've

trusted for years is now drastically inconsistent. It's as if something we've always taken for granted, winter, might disappear like... well, melting snow.

The way people talk tells a much deeper

story about our collective view of the impending future. I've observed a dialect of uncertainty, evidenced by the use of the one-word question at the end of every sentence: *Right?* Someone will agree eventually.

This is just a rough season. Right?

Every day I hear my fellow West Coast snow sliders say words to the effect of: *Snow isn't what it used to be... Another Pineapple Express is headed our way... The snow line is going to be above 7,500 feet... Another big layoff coming up after the holiday...*

Are we experiencing collective mental depression. Or could we, like Plains farmers during the 1930s, be sensing and interpreting signs that presage a dramatic, Dust Bowl-like danger ahead?

It's ironic that many Dust Bowl refugees settled in the West, and once again climate is causing migration. An instructor I know from Snoqualmie Pass in Washington State left in January for a job 3,000 miles away at Sunday River in Maine. He was happy with the choice, but realized that the bitter, Polar Vortex-induced cold temps and high winds made life as an instructor less than idyllic.

An instructor who works at a resort

close to my home said, "The changes in the climate are affecting our livelihoods. Our mountain had a particularly hard year. There wasn't much work, which translates to less money in our pockets. I rely on skiing to keep me healthy, and now I've gained weight. It seems like my healthy, skinny ski body was a flash in the pan, one of those things you look back on and say, *those were the days.*"

Change has always been a part of our

SNOW ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE... ANOTHER PINEAPPLE EXPRESS IS HEADED OUR WAY...

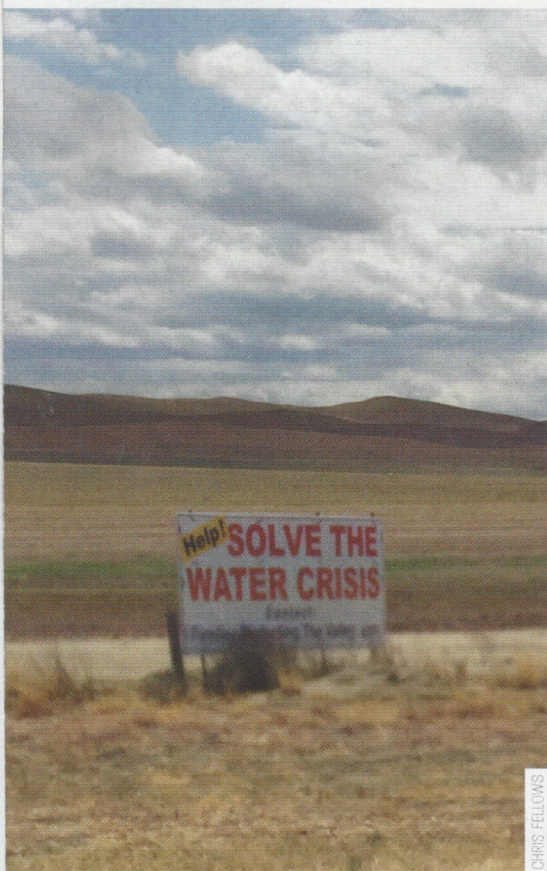
professional work environment – the seasonality adds to the freshness, and the cycle of birth-death-rebirth is invigorating. But, recently, Mother Nature can't be counted on.

The rhythm of the West Coast winters has shifted from somewhat predictable deep Sierra Nevada dumps to wild, aberrant swings in temperature and wind, and ever-higher snow lines.

Driving into Squaw Valley this winter, one could see a clear white-to-brown line ring the 7,500-foot contour mark around the entire valley. On days when the snow fell above the line, hoards of pent-up passholders bottlenecked the entrance to the Funitel lift, lining up like lab rats for their reward for staying in the maze. Others drove off the hill to go somewhere else, probably to bike and play golf when they'd otherwise be skiing and riding... maybe even taking lessons.



On March 7, 2011 on Donner Summit there was a 20-foot snowpack. In four short seasons the area has gone from all the lakes and reservoirs being full and substantial mountain snowpack to literally nothing.



CHRIS FELLOWS

California's mountain snowpack officially hit zero percent of normal on May 29, and signs like this along the I-5 in Central Valley tell the story.

Instructors who committed to a resort for the season were left out at a soggy lineup like laundry left on the line during a rain storm. One instructor, true story, said to his students, "I'm not sure what you expect to learn today, the skiing is terrible and it's due to global warming!"

There is a real sense among our ski and snowboard instructor ground troops that we are losing our battle against climate change. A mother who raised her children skiing on slopes near Reno told me she feels like she's been trying to "out-ski climate change." But, climate change is gaining on her. "I think I could get into another sport," she said, "but I keep thinking that when the snow goes, the water goes, too, so how long will it be possible to have a life here in the Truckee Meadows that resembles what it was like in the '70s, '80s or even '90s?"

The snowsports industry is trying its best to put on a happy face with promises of bigger, better expansions of facilities and never-before-offered services, but until we see a drastic shift in the weather patterns, we will be funneled into smaller patches of a thinner layer of snow, higher and higher toward the mountain summit until we eventually find ourselves skiing at the edge of the earth. *Right?* **32°**

A former two-term member of the PSIA Alpine Team, **Chris Fellows** is the author of *Total Skiing* and *Tactics for All Mountain Skiing*, has worked closely with the Center for Health and Sports Performance, and is an adviser for several snowsports industry companies. He wishes to thank Melanie Ann Peck, of CommuniClarity, for insights shared during the development of this essay. Email: chrisnastc@gmail.com; Facebook: www.facebook.com/chris.fellows.3994; website: <http://skinastc.com/>



FOR MORE PERSPECTIVE ON CLIMATE CHANGE, SEE PAGE 50.

WHAT PSIA-AASI HAS DONE FOR ME

By "Last Chair Dave" Iskowitz

PSIA-AASI has given me countless hours of fun riding, learning, and meeting other instructors across the U.S. I've got a great network of instructors at my home mountain, Camelback, Pennsylvania, some of whom have helped me expand my network at other mountains I've visited. An examiner from my division introduced me to a former AASI Snowboard Team member I was able to ride and train with a couple of times in Colorado. Another time a fellow instructor from Camelback put me in touch with certified instructor friends at Buttermilk, Colorado; when I went there, I was able to rip some runs with them and meet other PSIA-AASI members. Alternatively, a few times visiting instructors have showed up at our mountain, and if I'm able, I get out there and make some runs with them. After all, that's why we are here – to ride 'n slide.

This unique organization has challenged my riding and allowed me to improve, made me a better and more effective teacher, and introduced me to a wonderful group of friends along the way. It's great fun to train and help out fellow instructors, pushing each other for the next level of certification and making lifelong friendships in the process. It's so cool to see the PSIA or AASI pin on the jacket of a stranger and instantly be able to connect and share life-changing stories about what this organization has done for us. I wouldn't trade it for anything.



Dave Iskowitz

Dave Iskowitz is a Level III snowboard instructor at Pennsylvania's Camelback Resort, in Eastern Division.