



## UP THE CREEK February 1, 2014

Since the US mail doesn't deliver on Sunday, you will receive this after February 2, so the subject matter herein will be out of date. Unless you subscribe to email billing, which either delivers your water bill and newsletter immediately or not at all, depending on the reliability of your internet service and ours – both of which could be called into question on any given day. Anyhow, out of date or not, this letter deals with groundhogs and their weather predictive skill. Traditionally we parade the name of Punxsutawney Phil in this edition, to see how many of you catch the atrocious spelling that we reinvent every year.

But did you know – we didn't – that Phil is not the only innocent groundhog who is yanked, fighting tooth and claw, from his burrow to “predict” the arrival of spring? In fact records have been kept for at least six years on 41 different weather rodents in as many towns. Most are clustered along the US-Canada border because, we guess, that's where people are more concerned about the arrival of spring, especially this year. None are recorded for Phoenix, Arizona. Understandable, because by February 2, springtime in Phoenix is well under way and the dragon of summer is snorting close by. Yet at the University of Dallas, Texas, not a particularly cold spot, they declare a school holiday for Groundhog Day. The students maybe got cheated this year, since it's a Sunday.

We learned that Punxsutawney doesn't have a lock on the weird name either. How about Shubenacadie Sam (Nova Scotia). Then there is General Beauregard Lee (Georgia), Octoraro Orphie (Pennsylvania), Balzac Billy (Alberta), and Sir Walter Wally (North Carolina). Less imaginative towns saddle their animals with names like Uni, Gus, Fred, and “Grady The Groundhog.” Lame. Colorado's own 'hog name, “Flatiron Freddie,” fails to inspire, but is nonetheless important because his domain is the Peoples' Republic of Boulder, where it's believed that he is associated with NCAR, the National Center for Atmospheric Research. Every time Flatiron Freddie pokes his head above ground, it generates another press release on the topic of climate change.

With so many rodents on the job, you'd think that weather forecasting would be a piece of cake by now. But how accurate are they? Well there are statistics kept on this, of course, and they are used, in the manner typical of statistics, to prove diametrically opposite points of view. Organizers of Groundhog Day(TM) have proven that Phil and his bretheren have been right 79% of the time. On the other hand, the NCDC (National Climatic Data Center) has gone out of its way to publish a report, with statistical tables coming out its ears, called *Groundhog Forecasters Versus US Temperature Record*, in which the groundhog is haughtily dismissed as “on average, inaccurate...has shown no talent for predicting the arrival of spring, especially in recent years.” One might infer from that statement that the talent was better in earlier years; perhaps they don't make 'em like they used to? We suspect that NCDC is envious of NCAR, which we bet was awarded better funding from Washington DC on the basis of their budget line item labeled Flatiron Freddie, Consultant.

Speaking of Washington DC, their weather rat is named Potomac Phil. That's extra lame, in the judgment of USCDWUA (Upper Surface Creek Domestic Water Users Association), the acknowledged authority on lame names.