



UP THE CREEK

February 1, 2010

This being the annual Groundhog Day edition, it would be unnatural if we don't discuss the weather, so let's do. First off, we need to get the groundhog's name out there. It's Punxsutawney Phil. When I typed that, the computer drew a red line under "Punxsutawney," meaning it never heard of it before, which is a lie, because that word has been in every February edition of Up The Creek since time began. I admit that it has been spelled in several unique ways, which might have broken the computer's spell checker.

Punxsutawney is a borough in Jefferson County, Pennsylvania. The 2000 census showed a population of 6500, the same as it was in 1900. In case you are thinking that groundhogs are its only claim to fame, the name comes from a Delaware Indian term for "Town of the Sandflies."¹

When on Tuesday Punxsutawney Phil is hauled from his burrow into the television lights by handlers wearing top hats and armored gloves, he will be thinking about several things. One will be, "Put me back, if you please, right now." But, being a true weatherman, he will also be considering all the factors that weigh on his decision whether or not to allow the sun to shine, thereby determining whether or not his shadow is cast.

He will probably recall that in the second week of December, 304 cold temperature records and 815 snowfall records were set across our country.² Should he ask us, we could tell him that in December, USCDWUA'S weather station recorded an average temperature of 22 degrees, the coldest since we started keeping track in 1996. January so far is the second coldest in our record, at 26 degrees average. Should he ask us, we could tell him that our water system has suffered more pipeline freeze-ups than any time in memory. And that in driving to and from work, we've noticed more cars in the ditch³ than normal, their drivers having learned that even 4-wheel drive and anti-lock brakes don't fool mother nature.

If Phil were to ask us today, we would vote for sunshine, even if it means he would cast a shadow. We would like to see that big yellow ball once in a while. The way the ground is frozen, it's going to take a month of sun-days to get any heat back into it.

Which brings us to perhaps the main purpose of this letter, if it even has a purpose, other than trying out the nifty footnotes. (Don't worry, we won't make a habit of it.) The purpose would be to caution both Phil and our readers: don't let your guard down. It is normal to have a spell of nice sunny days in February which look for all the world like the end of winter - don't believe it. When a winter gets this deep, and the frost in the ground gets this deep, then it ain't over until it's over. This year, that will probably be, oh, around Easter Sunday.

So, if you are one of the many people who are letting water run to forestall frozen pipes, it is wise to keep right on, even if we get a few nice days where we can feel as if winter never happened. This year, it sure as heck did.

dh

¹ These purported facts came from a ten-second study of "Wikipedia," the most thoroughly unreliable source of information on the planet.

² From NOAA, which is somewhat less unreliable than Wikipedia.

³ Yeah, even including our own once or twice.