This page was exported from - King Weekly Sentinel
Export date: Fri Oct 30 13:12:20 2026 / +0000 GMT

2014 takes the warmest year award

By Skid Crease

Well, there you have it. You might not believe that the planet is continuing to warm, especially if you are living along the northeast coast of North America right now, but 2014 is absolutely the warmest year on record! How do I know this to be a fact? NASA and their Goddard Institute for Space Studies said so.

I had the privilege several years ago of connecting with NASA and the astronauts and scientists who have had the honour to view from space this miraculous blue jewel we call Earth. In 1989, I was presented with their book, The Home Planet, conceived and edited by Kevin W. Kelley for the Association of Space Explorers.

The inscription on the cover page took me completely by surprise: To Skid, the person who most of all will understand this book.

As an environmental educator in the late ?80s, I had been going across Canada doing a series of speaking engagements on environmental issues, global climate change, and earth and space sciences. But the stories I told were their stories, and the science I relayed to my audiences was their science. I was simply their storyteller and I was truly humbled by the gift of their book.

I guess they thought I was getting it right, and so long after I stopped public speaking, I kept getting their monthly updates.

The latest for February 2015 lists the 10 warmest years since weather records have been recorded in North America, with 2014 taking the top spot as the warmest year ever recorded. In fact, all 10 of those years have occurred since 1998, further reinforcement for the scientific consensus concerning accelerating climate change.

Now these are not granola crunching, tree hugging, peace-loving hippies. These are the scientists from NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies. Their one agenda is the collection and accurate reporting of data about the state of the Earth. They are not eco-terrorists like Exxon/Imperial Oil, Olin Chemical, Monsanto, Kinder Morgan or the Koch brothers, and so they tend not to be climate change deniers or purveyors of deliberately misleading information. So when they tell you that 2014 was the hottest year on record, believe it.

What does this all mean for us? As citizens of King, Canada, home planet Earth, it means that we need to carefully check our sources of information. An opinion is only as good as the material that feeds it, and so the old adage of ?garbage in ? garbage out? holds very true about environmental issues.

We have to become media literate, read every article, watch every ad, and listen to every news sound bite with a grain of salt. Especially in an era where ?Our Government? has become a cheerleader for extraction industries at the expense of valid environmental policies.

Information from the companies that profit from resource extraction, the agri-business, and pharmaceutical wonder drugs are interested primarily in making money for their shareholders and the .01% of the population that make up their top executives. Their research is selected to support their product development and sales, and their advertisements are slick and soothing. Just like the Economic Action Plan commercials for hard-working families. Like the ads for swamp land in Florida.

For every news bite I get, I spend a great deal of time researching the source. Who paid for the ad? What are the credentials of the expert who provided the information? Am I being encouraged to buy a product, or is this a public service announcement? Are the scientists involved currently practicing in their field, recently published in their area of expertise, and peer-reviewed by their colleagues? Is this a partisan pre-election sales pitch?

We always carry our own filters on the information we read. It could be because of our religious upbringing, our political beliefs, the discussions or arguments we heard around the dinner table as kids, our life experience, so none of us are without bias. The trick with really good reporting is to find that middle ground where all the data comes together, all the stories begin to show a pattern, and you get a whole lot closer to a truth.

That is why I trust NASA. They do their homework and they cross-check and compare all of their data with colleagues around the world. Are they perfect? Yes, there are huge government and private industry contracts to be won. And yes, they opposed data about CFCs and ozone depletion so that Congress wouldn't suspend their shuttle flights. Nobody's perfect. They were forgiven when the Montreal Protocol was signed. The monitoring of Earth systems and the pursuit of environmental literacy became as important to them as their next space flights.

Why do we continue to tilt at windmills in pursuit of the impossible dream of an environmentally literate society? Perhaps that can best be answered in the following quote. In the foreword to The Home Planet, Jacques Cousteau, a man who loved this water planet unconditionally, wrote this about our space explorers:

?From their exceptional journeys they all came back with the revelation of beauty. Beauty of the black sky, beauty and variety of our planet, beauty of the Earth seen from the moon, girdled by a scintillating belt of equatorial thunderstorms. They all emphasize that our planet is one, that borderlines are artificial, that humankind is one single community on board spaceship Earth. They all insist that this fragile gem is at our mercy, and that we must all endeavour to protect it.?

Skid Crease is an award-winning outdoor and environmental educator, a keynote speaker, a storyteller, an author, and a community volunteer. He taught with the North York and Toronto District School boards for 35 years, and officially ?retired? from the Faculty of Education, York University, where he was a Course Director and Environmental Science Advisor. Skid has worked with scientists from Environment Canada (pre-2005), NASA, and the Hadley Centre for Climate Prediction and Research in a quest to put an understandable story behind the wealth of their scientific data.