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[Home](#) > [Science Magazine](#) > E-Letters**E-Letter responses to:****n-week:****Pallava Bagla****No Sign Yet of Himalayan Meltdown, Indian Report Finds**Science 2009; 326: 924-925 [\[Summary\]](#) [\[Full text\]](#) [\[PDF\]](#)► **E-Letters: [Submit a response to this article](#)****PUBLISHED E-LETTER RESPONSES:**▼ **Tracking the Source of Glacier Misinformation**

J. Graham Cogley, Jeffrey S. Kargel, G. Kaser, C. J. van der Veen (20 January 2010)

Tracking the Source of Glacier Misinformation

20 January 2010

J. Graham Cogley
Department of
Geography, Trent
University,
Peterborough,
ON, K9J 7B8,
Canada,
Jeffrey S. Kargel,
G. Kaser, C. J.
van der Veen

Respond to this E-
Letter:

[Re: Tracking the
Source of Glacier
Misinformation](#)

A recent News of the Week story on Himalayan glaciers ("No sign yet of Himalayan meltdown, Indian report finds," P. Bagla, 13 November 2009, p. 924) highlights how inadequately reviewed material makes its way into the public consciousness. One source, Working Group II (WG-II) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [p. 493 and 494 in (1)] reproduces several errors. The Working Group writes that "[g]laciers in the Himalaya are receding faster than in any other part of the world" and that "the likelihood of them disappearing by the year 2035 and perhaps sooner is very high if the Earth keeps warming at the current rate. Its total area will likely shrink from the present 500,000 to 100,000 km² by the year 2035." Another source (2) advances a no less mistaken conjecture, not discussed in Bagla's News story, that Himalayan glaciers are responding to the climate of as long as 15,000 years ago.

The IPCC Fourth Assessment, particularly of the physical science basis for the changes, is mostly accurate, but the first WG-II sentence above derives from a World Wildlife Fund report (3), which cites a news story (4) about an unpublished study (5) that neither compares Himalayan glaciers with other rates of recession nor estimates a date for disappearance of Himalayan glaciers. Himalayan rates of recession in the WG-II report (1) are not exceptional (6). In the second WG-II sentence, "its" cannot refer to Himalayan glaciers [area about 33,000 km² (7)], and may refer to the world total area of glaciers and ice caps. A bibliographic search suggests that the second WG-II sentence is copied inaccurately from (8), in which the predicted date for shrinkage of the world total from 500,000 to 100,000 km² is 2350, not 2035.

The claim that Himalayan glaciers may disappear by 2035 requires a 25-fold greater loss rate from 1999 to 2035 than that estimated for 1960 to 1999 (7). It conflicts with knowledge of glacier-climate relationships, and is wrong. Nevertheless it has captured the global imagination and has been repeated in good faith often, including recently by the IPCC's chairman (9).

These errors could have been avoided had the norms of scientific publication, including peer review and concentration upon peer-reviewed work, been respected.

J. Graham Cogley

Department of Geography, Trent University, Peterborough, ON, K9J 7B8, Canada.

Jeffrey S. Kargel

Department of Hydrology and Water Resources, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721, USA.

G. Kaser

Institut für Geographie, University of Innsbruck, A-6020 Innsbruck, Austria.

C. J. van der Veen

Department of Geography, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045, USA.

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