

Opinion: Good news — Jersey Shore will still be habitable in 2100

Alarmist reports predicting catastrophic effects this century from the warming of the Earth's climate reached another peak this month — no small achievement given the popularity of the genre.

A Delaware online financial news and opinion company, 24/7 Wall St., put out a list of what it called “American cities that will soon be underwater.” It was put together by two of its editors, who used the worst imaginable outcomes from a study last year by the advocacy group Union of Concerned Scientists.

They said nearly 97 percent of Atlantic City will be underwater by the end of the century. Ditto Ocean City, where only 2 percent of its land would remain habitable.

Making this nightmare forecast wasn't easy. For starters, the editors used the worst-case scenario from the UCS range of sea level possibilities for 2100 — an extravagant 6.5 feet higher than today.

To put that in context, consider that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says global sea level rose 2.6 inches from 1993 to 2014 — and “continues to rise at a rate of about one-eighth of an inch per year.” Let's see, 80 years times one-eighth of an inch per year would equal a sea level rise of 10 inches for the rest of the century, not 78 inches (6.5 feet).

Even if somehow this worst possible sea level rise occurred, that alone wouldn't make Jersey Shore barrier islands uninhabitable. That would take something more difficult to imagine and already disproved — that everyone does nothing to reduce or avoid the flooding.

In its description of how it produced the report, 24/7 Wall St. admits that “the estimates published by the UCS do not take into account the mitigating effects” of flood reduction with flood gates, walls, levees, natural structures and property acquisitions — all established approaches that are being expanded.

This is the same basic error behind another widely reported climate false alarm this month, that rising seas could submerge “vast swaths of land, displacing almost 200 million people by the end of the century,” as NBC News put it. That, too, required a worst-case rise of more than 6 feet and the false assumption that no one does anything to adapt to such dramatically rising seas — and reworked old data, from 2011, into the more alarming forecast.

Many seem to believe that the potential harms of a changing climate must be portrayed as fearfully as possible to produce sufficient support for efforts to mitigate them and reduce the human component of warming. This backfires, though, when people see they're being manipulated and increase their skepticism about reporting on climate science. Focusing on what scientists think is most likely and including their degree of uncertainty (often expressed as ranges for multiple important data points) would be more convincing and helpful in building the necessary public consensus.

This much is more certain than any climate forecast: The world will be far richer and more resilient by the end of the century, and much abler to respond and adapt to the climate and sea level then. Even the

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of the United Nations assumes so, in all of its scenarios for the future.