Essays of a Peripheral Mind

Crazy Crab

By K. M. Havstad

It might have been the worst mascot in the history of major league baseball. It might have been the worst mascot in sports, period. Ever. That is an amazing accomplishment, to be that bad. Fortunately, the Crazy Crab's existence was for just a single year, 1984 (photograph). As you might expect in a sports-crazed environment, a mascot this bad was the victim of various forms of verbal and physical abuse. And, given this was baseball, a sport heavily based on throwing things (mostly baseballs, but also helmets, bats, gloves, and taunts), most of the abuse involved pitching things at the Crab. One episode in mascot lore involved a pregame incident where the Crab was along the sidelines near the stands, and the fans. The Crazy Crab became an immediate target for hot dog wrappers and beer

The Crazy Crab, the short-lived and much despised mascot of the San Francisco Giants baseball franchise in 1984 and a symbol of bad ideas, bad analyses, bad decisions, and bad management, on the field during its one season in existence.

cups, and the situation prompted management to put the following message on the stadium score board: *Please do not throw things at the Crazy Crab.*

As you would expect, this being a crowd of baseball fans, the message simply caused them to more intently throw anything available at the Crab, forcing it to scurry beyond second base and out of range of these amateur arms, most well beyond their glory years, real or imagined.

The Crab was equally disliked by the players, including members of the home team. Two former players for the San Francisco Giants in 1984, Duane Kuiper and Mike Krukow, now excellent broadcasters, were asked how they contended with the Crab during that year. Their response was classic baseball player: "We would just peg the Crab with the rosin bagⁱ whenever it came near us, so it learned to stay away."

There is an observation within this recollection that I find of some use. Someone, a well-paid executive or maybe even a committee of private business people, dreamed up the Crab, designed it, promoted it, and, eventually, put the Crazy Crab on the field. This wasn't just a bad idea. If this was confined to simply a bad idea, the Crab would have died in either a committee or as a sketch on someone's desk. No, the Crab's eventual existence represents the full gamut of bad, from the original bad idea, to the subsequent bad analysis (whatever that might have been), to the bad design (looking at the photograph, would you have known this was a crab if you had not been told?), to the overall concurrence by management, and to the eventual implementation. Given

ⁱ A small cloth bag filled with a drying agent such as sericitic clay to absorb moisture from a player's hands.

that the Crab has passed away, so to speak, I've adopted it as a sort of patron saint of anything bad.

Some examples of the Crab's patron saint utility:

- The production of noncommercial vehicles that have a low miles per gallon of gasoline (mpg) rating in an era of \$4+/gallon gasoline (or even \$2/gallon)—that's just Crazy Crab.
- Buying a personal vehicle with a low mpg rating—Crazy Crab.
- The gamut of factors that result in the obscene US high school dropout rates—Crazy Crab.
- Our continued inability to effectively contribute to diplomatic sustainable solutions to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, or any of the other Middle East conflicts—Crazy Crab.
- Subprime mortgage loan disaster—Crazy Crab.
- Drinking cheap tequila—Crazy Crab.

A score and 4 yr after its invention and demise, the Crazy Crab has resurfaced to provide some personal utility, and a utility that, unfortunately, transfers to our profession as well.

Here are some rangeland resource management-related issues that deserve the Crazy Crab label:

Monitoring systems that fail to start from a reasoned stratification of the ecologically based features of a landscape—Crazy Crab.

Most landscape dynamics are driven by factors linked to soils, geomorphology, landscape position, and other biophysical features that characterize rangeland and its vegetation. Understanding the dynamics of these communities requires stratifying the landscape based on these drivers. Monitoring systems that place observational points without regard for these delineating features, without recognizing ecological sites and landscape position for example, will result in authentic frontier gibberish (see earlier essay in April 2008). Even if the monitoring "system" has been in place for decades, if it never had this orientation, if it had been built around other artificial stratifications (e.g., distance from a livestock watering point, or the random location of a plot based on the throw of a dart, for example) without reasoned considerations of a landscape and its ecology, it will not result in information as intended, no matter how long the record of observations.

Suggesting that reductionist-based experimentation that addresses single dependant variables of a much larger ecological-social-economic system has little utility to the needs of land managers who have to work within this much more complex system—Crazy Crab.

Experimentation is typically quite site-specific, often short-term, and often constrained by limited experimental designs.

Yet, despite these limits, many basic land management principles used by land managers have been developed from the ecological processes that have been revealed through scientific investigations. Granted, land management decisions are made within a much larger realm than that addressed by any experimental design. That doesn't mean those specific questions/hypotheses and resulting data don't have application, they just have application to a component of the larger issues and systems under management. For example, we can ask specific questions about how an aspect of a system, for example, annual net aboveground primary production of dominant perennial grasses for a series of years, responds to specific timing and intensity combinations of grazing by livestock for particular ecological sites. The resulting data and their interpretation can then inform the often larger sets of decisions that determine how grazing is managed within that system, or other ecologically similar systems where these kinds of data might not yet be available. Management often might be heavily reliant upon the artistic capacities of the manager, but it still has a science-informed element available to enhance the art.

Trying to manage a mobile large wild herbivore (e.g., like bison) within an artificial boundary (e.g., like a national park)—Crazy Crab.

Fortunately, many individuals, organizations, agencies, and public interests have learned this Crazy Crab lesson, and large herbivore management is being developed across landscapes and their embedded boundaries. A good example is the solutions that have emerged in recent years after untold analyses, discussions, and expenditures that recognize property rights and disease control issues, but also create and propose reasonable, landscape-level approaches to the control of bison, a vector for brucellosis, that has a large spatial scale presence in the Yellowstone area. Unfortunately, despite this positive turn of events, Crazy Crab still roams this field, and negates the collaborative efforts of ranchers, ecologists, land managers, and the interested public. Any entity that works solely from within its own boundaries is guilty of donning the Crab costume.

It is important to note that issues that give cause to invoke the Crazy Crab label can justify further reactions. For what seem to be really bad Crazy Crab situations, I think the Kuiper and Krukow baseball player strategy needs to be more broadly employed.

Please throw things at any Crazy Crab.

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