

“Where Can We Go?” Developing a Communications Strategy to Move Endangered Residents to Climate Change Haven Communities

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Abstract

Few studies have yet focused on communications strategies for moving persons from climate endangered areas of their home country to safer areas within the country. The present study develops a communications plan for moving endangered California residents to safer areas in the Appalachian Mountain Region. Presently, over 24 million US residents live in Southern California. During the past five years, they have faced increasingly damaging events attributable to climate change. Among these are wildfires, droughts, floods, and landslides which have caused billions of dollars in damages. It is vital that these residents be moved to a safer, more habitable location within the United States. The Virginia Highlands can serve as a re-location area for 2,300,000 of these Americans. We present a multi-media communications campaign for attracting these California residents to the Virginia Highlands and simultaneously preparing current Virginia Highlands residents for their arrival.

Keywords

Climate Change Haven Communities, United States Internal Migration, Climate Change Communications

1. Introduction

As the destructive impacts of climate change increase in frequency and intensity, the peoples and countries in their path are faced with dire choices. If those living

in endangered areas stay in their current location, they will be faced with the loss of their jobs, their communities and even their lives [1]-[3]. Yet many residents in threatened areas are hesitant to leave. Some because they fear change; others because they do not believe the climate crisis is genuine, and still others because they do not know where else they could go [4]-[6]. United States residents in several impacted regions are currently facing these same issues [7].

Notably, the three most populous and economically important states in the US are among those most climate-threatened [8] [9]. **Texas** is confronting a future filled with droughts, floods and wildfires that are already impacting its agricultural and manufacturing capabilities [10]. **Florida** is experiencing an increased level of flooding and coastal erosion due to the onslaught of tropical storms, hurricanes and sea level rise [11] [12].

But the most economically damaging climate change events in recent years have been visited upon **California**—the most populous and economically important state in the US. Southern California has been especially challenged during the past five years by a series of floods, droughts, wildfires and landslides due to the warming climate and the advent of torrential atmospheric rivers. These have caused billions of dollars in property damages and resulted in business bankruptcies, home loss and dramatic increases in insurance rates [13]-[16]. Images of these recent climate change events in California are provided in **Figures 1-3**.

California's current population is 33,000,000 persons, of which 24 million live in Southern California. Because of the increasing rate of climate-caused damage to homes and businesses in Southern California, insurance rates have become unaffordable for many residents and companies. In extremely climate-threatened areas of Southern California, insurance has become unavailable [17]-[19]. Many of these residents now realize that moving their families and businesses to a safer location is necessary—but where can they go? The present study presents an option that may be attractive to some residents; but which others may resist due to a mental attitude termed **climate change denial**.



Figure 1. Southern California wildfires spring 2025.



Figure 2. Southern California landslides and flooding spring 2025.



Figure 3. Southern California drought fall 2024.

2. Literature Review

Climate Change Denial

Prior research on persons living in climate-endangered areas has found that some residents may be hesitant to look for alternative places to live due to a psychological phenomenon termed Climate Change Denial [20] [21]. In Climate Change Denial, individuals emotionally minimize the risks and likelihood of climate change affecting their lives in order to protect themselves from anxiety [22]. Overcoming this resistance can be a difficult hurdle for communications aimed at encouraging persons to move from the climate-endangered areas in which they currently live to safer areas elsewhere [23].

However, a recent meta-analysis of the Climate Change Denial literature [23] found that this trait was most common among persons having a social dominance orientation and personalities characterized by right-wing authoritarianism. Conversely, persons characterized by openness to new ideas, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and consideration of future consequences were oriented

toward accepting the reality of climate change and being willing to make alterations in their own lives to mitigate its effects on their well-being.

Communications about the dangers of climate change, therefore, are most likely to be effective with this second, receptive group of persons, while these same communications targeted toward the climate change denial group are likely to have little chance of success. Southern Californians are characterized as being among the most creative, open to new experiences and able to consider multiple alternatives in the United States [24]. Thus, a substantial number of the Southern California residents endangered by climate change may be receptive to communications informing them about areas in the United States having a safer climate change forecast than where they live now.

The Appalachian Mountain Region as a Possible Relocation Site

Recent research [25] has indicated that one of the most viable areas for climate change re-location within the Continental United States is the Appalachian Mountain Region. This area extends across the interior of the eastern US from New York state to the northern portions of Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi, as shown in Figure 4 below.



Figure 4. Map of the Appalachian Mountain Region.

Within the Appalachian Mountain Region, the focus of the present study is the counties composing the Virginia Highlands Region. The Virginia Highlands are the mountainous area of Virginia which ranges from the state's southwestern bor-

ders with Tennessee and Kentucky upward along Virginia's northern border with West Virginia (see **Figure 5** below).

Virginia

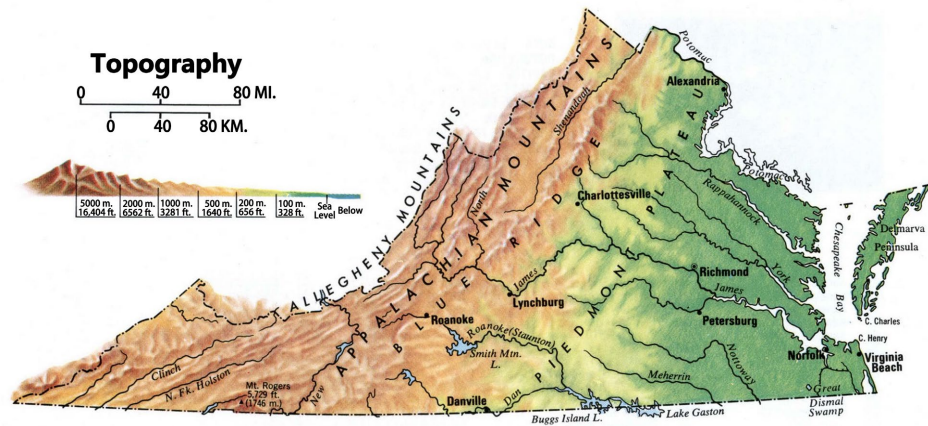


Figure 5. The Virginia Highlands include 36 counties in north and southwestern Virginia.

The Virginia Highlands has very low population density and abundant water resources. These characteristics make it a desirable location for the construction of Climate Change Haven Communities for threatened US residents, as the communities can be built by expanding existing small towns in the region. Most towns in the VH Region have from 1000 to 6000 residents [25].

These towns already have existing administrative, health, education and business services and can serve as the nucleus for expansion into Climate Change Haven Communities of 25,000 to 30,000 residents. As proposed in earlier research, Climate Change Haven Communities will feature modular, eco-sustainable buildings and use hydro-power generators to supply electricity to their expanded populations [25]. The state of Virginia presently has a pro-business orientation, low property taxes, and a strong educational system, making it a desirable site for incoming migrants and businesses from climate-endangered areas of the United States, such as Southern California [26]-[28].

Other areas in the Appalachian Mountain Region, such as eastern Kentucky, southeast Tennessee, western North Carolina, West Virginia and western Pennsylvania are also suitable for climate-change threatened American migrants and would be able to support Climate Change Haven Communities. However, at this point, government officials have not undertaken efforts to plan and construct Climate Change Haven Communities in these areas.

The Northern Tier of the United States as a Climate Change Haven Community Site

Another US Climate Change Haven Region suitable for the relocation of endangered American migrants is the Northern Tier of states running from Washington State in the west to Maine in the east. However, recent climate events sug-

gest that this region will become more vulnerable to extreme cold periods in the future, as Arctic air from the North Polar Vortex descends through Canada and into the central United States [29]-[31]. These events are depicted in **Figure 6**. Thus, the Central Appalachian Region will likely be the best-balanced Climate Change Haven location within the Continental United States, and the Virginia Highlands currently seems the best choice within Central Appalachia.

Understanding the polar vortex

The Arctic polar vortex is a strong band of winds in the stratosphere, surrounding the North Pole 10–30 miles above the surface.

The polar vortex is far above and typically does not interact with the polar jet stream, the flow of winds in the troposphere 5–9 miles above the surface. But when the polar vortex is especially strong and stable, the jet stream stays farther north and has fewer “kinks.” This keeps cold air contained over the Arctic and the mid-latitudes warmer than usual.

Every other year or so, the Arctic polar vortex dramatically weakens. The vortex can be pushed off the pole or split into two. Sometimes the polar jet stream mirrors this stratospheric upheaval, becoming weaker or wavy. At the surface, cold air is pushed southward to the mid-latitudes, and warm air is drawn up into the Arctic.

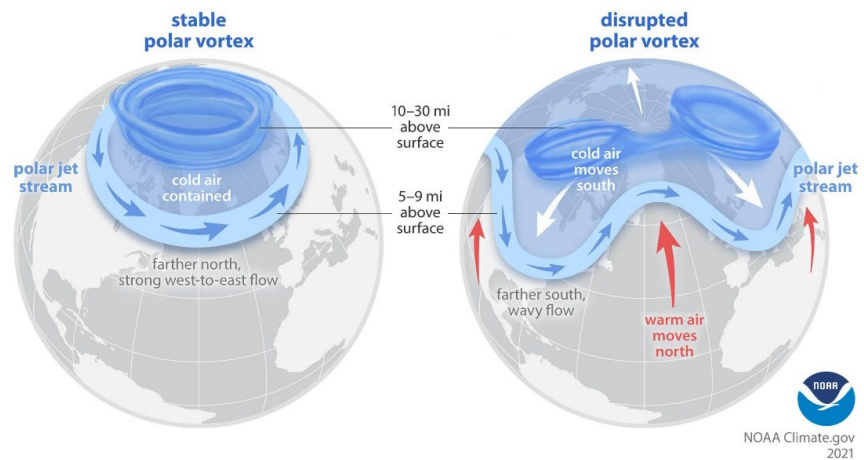


Figure 6. Origin and impact of the North Polar Vortex.

Cultural and Social Issues Involved in Climate Change Migration the Virginia Highlands

In seeking to attract endangered California residents to the Virginia Highlands, there are several cultural and sociological issues that need to be addressed. When research first began on using the Virginia Highlands as a potential location for Climate Change Haven Communities, primary attention was focused on attracting climate migrants from the Southeastern United States, especially the states of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina and Louisiana. The reasoning was that climate migrants from these areas of the US would have similar cultural, religious, and ethnic characteristics to the current residents of the Virginia Highlands, who tend to be Protestant and Conservative [32].

However, the extraordinary damage from recent climate change events in Southern California led to the realization that these endangered residents would need to be the first moved to safer areas within the United States and that initial communication efforts should be directed toward them. As noted earlier, the culture of Southern California is characterized by acceptance of a wide variety of religious

traditions, ethnic origins, racial heterogeneity, individual creativity and liberalism.

This sociological and psychological profile contrasts with the values typically attributed to persons living in Appalachia, who are predominately white, rural, Protestant and conservative [32] [33]. At first glance, these characteristics would appear problematic for re-locating Southern Californians to the region. However, a deeper reading of these core Appalachian values provides a **gateway for crafting a communications message** that will enable current residents in the Virginia Highlands Region of Appalachia to welcome newcomers from Southern California and, concurrently, reassure the Southern California migrants that they will be safe, secure and supported in their new location.

The key communication theme will be appealing to Virginia Highlands residents' cultural value of **helping those in need**, which the arriving Southern California migrants will surely be. Simultaneously, communications will also be needed to reassure incoming Southern California migrants that they will be **welcomed and safe** in their new communities. The central communication proposition will emphasize that the Virginia Highlands is largely immune from the major negative impacts of current and future climate change and that those arriving from Southern California will be able to resume their lives and careers in a beautiful, healthy and nature-rich environment.

In essence, the migrating Southern Californians will be moving to the same kind of **natural paradise** that characterized Southern California from the 1930s to the 1980s. That paradise has now been lost forever, but now there is a new one available to them.

We now present a communications campaign describing the Virginia Highlands as a site for re-locating Southern California residents displaced by the recent environmental disruptions. The primary focus is placed upon developing messages directed at both attracting Southern California residents and preparing the current residents of the Virginia Highlands to welcome these new arrivals.

3. Methodology

Expanding The Virginia Highlands Development Site

Earlier Climate Change Haven Community development efforts were focused on a small set of counties in the Virginia Highlands Region. In the present project, the Climate Change Haven Community concept is expanded to include a total of 36 counties (approximately 30% of the state of Virginia's total land area). All of the counties included in the expanded CCHC project are mountainous and have ample water resources, enabling the use of hydro-power generators as the primary power source for each community. Solar and wind turbines may also be installed, where viable, to supply additional eco-sustainable electricity.

Because of the geographic enlargement of the in-migration project, the communication campaign needs to be consistent across the entire Virginia Highlands Region. Both the Southern California migrants entering the Region and the resi-

dents already living there need to view the area as a **unified entity**; one whose success depends on inter-county cooperation. A trademark/logo and consistent communication strategy were developed for presenting the Virginia Highlands Climate Change Community concept in all messages directed toward potential migrants from Southern California and current residents in the Virginia Highlands Region. The goal is to unify the Region with a **single brand identity**.

Choosing Communication Media

Several types of media were considered for implementing this new strategy, for example, television, radio, direct mail, on-line and billboards were all evaluated for their appropriateness and cost. Ultimately, radio, billboards and on-line (TikTok) messaging were chosen based on their ability to target specific geographic audiences and their relative cost.

Radio and Billboard Messages to Southern California Residents

Southern California is a car-driving culture [24]. There are very few mass transit options, e.g., bus, train, subway, available for Southern California residents, so the great majority drive a car to and from work, shopping, and entertainment. This means that most residents spend several hours each week “on the road” along with thousands of other drivers. Two of the most heavily travelled routes are the Interstate 5 Highway and the 91 Freeway [34]. Commuters often spend over an hour each way on these highways and therefore have ample time to listen to the radio and look out their car windows. Because of this, billboards and radio commercials should be strong media choices for reaching Southern California residents.

Below are three 30 second radio scripts designed to be played during rush hour traffic periods on primary radio stations in Southern California. They emphasize the increasing economic challenges and environmental dangers of living in Southern California and offer the Virginia Highlands as an alternative that is safer, less expensive and more beautiful than where they are now—driving on a hot, crowded highway.

Radio

1) *Southern California: Natural disasters, sky-high insurance, and a climate nightmare. But what if I told you there's a place with spectacular mountain views and four beautiful seasons. A haven from the fires, floods, heat and other climate disasters you've been dealing with?*

Take a look at the Virginia Highlands! There you can buy a beautiful home for what you'd spend on insurance for a tiny apartment in LA! And instead of driving an hour to buy overpriced groceries, you'll get fresh, local food and a tight-knit community vibe. Love the outdoors and sad to see what is happening to the climate in Southern California? The Virginia Highlands has America's best hiking, fishing, and camping—and it is forecast to stay that way even decades from now.

SoCal used to be great, but with the constant climate disasters putting you and your family at risk, this is the moment to move to the original American Paradise. Move to the Virginia Highlands and return to Paradise. Look us up at www.virginiahighlands.com.

2) *Are you feeling the heat from Southern California's rising temperatures, forest fires and sky-high insurance prices? Are wildfires, droughts, floods and unaffordable insurance making your life miserable? It's time for a change! Imagine a place where the seasons change in harmony, with cool summers, snowy winters, and breathtaking natural beauty all year round. Welcome to the Virginia Highlands—where the air is always fresh and the climate is just right every season.*

You'll be happy to meet our friendly people, be surrounded by our scenic mountains, and live in a community that makes you feel at home. Now is the time to escape the climate and financial disasters of Southern California and embrace a healthier, happier chapter in your life. Become a part of our welcoming community. Come join us today in the Virginia Highlands. You can look us up at VirginiaHighlands.com.

3) *Attention Southern California residents! After the past few years, you know that wildfires, droughts and floods are going to continue to be a serious threat to your family, business and future. Your safety is our top priority. If you live in an area at high risk or have already been affected by the destruction of climate change, don't wait until it's too late! The Virginia Highlands are a climate change safe haven—filled with natural beauty, friendly people and just waiting for you to arrive! Stay safe, Southern California. Move now and protect what matters most – your family, your business, your life. Join us in the Virginia Highlands. Contact us at vahighlands@gmail.com.*

Southern California Billboards

The billboard below (Figure 7) is designed to list the reasons why Southern Californians should move to the Virginia Highlands. It also gives the on-line address of the TikTok site where more information can be found for making the move.

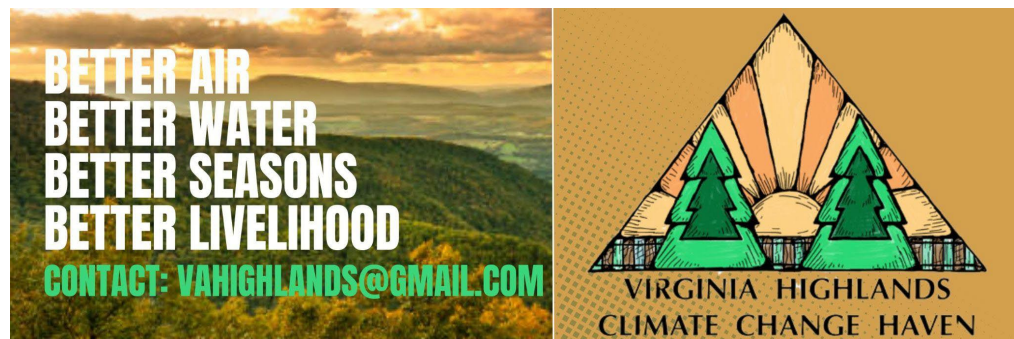


Figure 7. Billboard listing the reasons for moving to the Virginia Highlands.

The billboard below (Figure 8) is the first of a two-billboard set. It shows a photograph of wildfire damage near Los Angeles this spring to remind residents of what they just endured. Posted next to it will be the second billboard in the set, Figure 9, which shows the lush landscape of the Virginia Highlands and directs readers to visit the TikTok site which can provide them with information on how to make the transition to a safer, more nature-filled location.



Figure 8. Billboard showing wildfire damage to Southern California Spring 2025.



Figure 9. Billboard showing the lush mountains of the Virginia Highlands to which Southern California residents are invited to move.



Figure 10. Comparison of Southern California and Virginia Highlands Climates.

The split-screen billboard below, **Figure 10**, contrasts the recent fire destruction in Southern California with the bountiful natural and safe environment of the

Virginia Highlands.

Communications Directed Toward Virginia Highlands Residents

The second major communications task is to gain the cooperation of the current residents of the Virginia Highlands in welcoming and providing support to the incoming migrants from Southern California. Many of these newcomers will be bringing their businesses with them which will include computer technology, pharmaceutical development, motion picture production, telecommunication services, architectural design, medical and dental services, financial, insurance and investment services, as well as elementary, middle and high school educators, college professors, security personnel, and agricultural workers. All of these varied skills will be needed to support the functioning of the Climate Change Haven Communities in which they will be living.

The new arrivals will not only enlarge, but also greatly enhance, the existing communities in the Virginia Highlands by bringing occupational, educational and cultural resources that are presently scarce. To ensure a positive response from the current Virginia Highlands residents, 30 second radio messages have been prepared and will be aired on local radio stations within the Virginia Highlands Region. Examples of these are given below:

30 second radio message

“Virginia Highlands, have you noticed some new neighbors lately? They’re coming here from Southern California, and that’s a GOOD thing! Wildfires, droughts, and floods are pushing many families and companies out of Southern California. And where do they want to come? Right here! They are bringing new businesses, nice families and a deep appreciation for our beautiful mountains and friendly communities. These folks will give us all a stronger local economy, thriving schools and colleges and great quality medical and dental care. So, next time you meet new neighbors from Southern California, give them a warm Virginia Highlands welcome. Together, we will make the Highlands even better!”

30 second radio message

(Audio of running water, birds chirping, nature-themed ambiance)

“It is so relaxing to lie back and appreciate our Virginia Highlands natural beauty, isn’t it? Where we live every day would feel like heaven to the Southern California folks who have just lived through fires, droughts and floods ravaging their homes, businesses and lives. These folks have truly lost everything– but we can do something to help. Let’s support the Virginia Highlands plan to move some of these folks to our little slice of heaven. By building Climate Change Haven Communities, we can give hope to these Americans and provide a safe place for their families and businesses. And when they get here, they will be bringing jobs and a better future for us all. So let’s open up our hearts and communities and welcome them to their new home!”

30-Second Radio Message

“We are the Virginia Highlands—where communities thrive and nature provides. As families and businesses from Southern California arrive here to look for

new beginnings, we have the opportunity to welcome them and grow our economy and lives together. Our new neighbors are bringing fresh energy, good ideas, and a shared love for the land. The Virginia Highlands isn't just a safe climate haven—it's also a better future we can build hand-in-hand with these new arrivals from Southern California. Let's welcome them with open arms and together we can create a stronger community for generations to come. Virginia Highlands—home, no matter where you're from”

Billboards Directed to Virginia Highlands Residents

The four billboards shown below, **Figures 11-14**, will be placed on major roads across all 36 Virginia Highlands counties. Most of these counties have one major road over which residents drive frequently. Thus, the messages will reach the majority of the population across each county in the Region. The billboard messages and images are designed to emphasize the positive benefits the new arrivals from Southern California will bring to the Virginia Highlands Region, while also acknowledging the importance of community to local residents.



Figure 11. Billboard promoting new opportunities in the Virginia highlands region



Figure 12. Billboard directed toward attracting Southern California residents to the Virginia Highlands

Figure 11 and **Figure 12** above depict the advantages of having Southern Cali-

fornia residents move to the Virginia Highlands.



Figure 13. The economic advantages of having new arrivals from Southern California are depicted in the billboard above.



Figure 14. Welcoming new residents from Southern California will bring economic benefits.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This research project deals with an urgent, global issue—the need to re-locate persons living in severely climate-threatened areas to safer places that will allow them to carry on with their lives. Concurrently, efforts must also be made to ensure the newcomers are able to merge amicably with the resident population. If successful, the communications campaign developed in the present study will enable up to 2,300,000 Southern California residents to relocate their families, lives, and businesses to the 36 counties of the Virginia Highlands. This incoming population will bring very valuable economic, educational and cultural resources which are greatly needed in the Virginia Highlands Region. Both the incoming migrants and the current residents will benefit greatly from this population transfer and resettlement. But this will not come close to “solving the problem” of resettling the Americans who are currently living in climate-endangered areas of the country.

For example, census data place the current population of Southern California at around 24,000,000 persons. Thus, even if this migration project is completely successful, **fewer than 10%** of endangered Southern California residents will be able to relocate in Virginia Highlands Climate Change Haven Communities. Where can the rest go?

As noted at the outset of this research report, the Appalachian Mountain Region is projected to have the safest future climatic balance within the Continental United States; it is the **best choice** for Americans migrating from climate-endangered areas of the country. Yet the entire Central Appalachian Region (*i.e.*, the mountainous areas of Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania) will be able to hold **less than half** of the persons who need to evacuate from Southern California. Climate-endangered states such as Florida, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and Arizona will add tens of millions more persons to the total number of Americans who must be re-located within the next 5 to 10 years.

Therefore, states along the Northern Tier of the US, as well as Alaska, will have to be outfitted with Climate Change Haven Communities capable of withstanding the extreme cold winter periods anticipated to increase in length and frequency due to the disruption of the North Polar Vortex. Importantly, the projected North Polar Vortex shifts will also impact potential Climate Change Haven countries such as Sweden, Norway, Scotland, and Finland, threatening the suitability of these countries as shelters for European Union climate migrants.

Immediate research is required to develop detailed time and construction cost estimates for building these cold-proof Climate Change Haven Communities across northern Europe, as well as in North America. Their costs will likely be substantially higher than the estimates recently developed for the Appalachian Region [25], given the more demanding climate extremes in Northern Tier locations.

This brings us to the final—and most difficult—hurdle that must be overcome: financing the Climate Change Haven Community developments. Presently in the United States, the Federal Government is substantially lowering budgetary allocations for combatting climate change. National programs such as the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration and the Federal Emergency Management Administration are being greatly downsized or eliminated altogether [35]. Therefore, no Federal funding or support for constructing Climate Change Haven Communities will be available.

The most (and perhaps only) viable option in the United States will likely be **commercial entrepreneurial funding** through real estate development companies that recognize the enormous potential profitability of constructing Climate Change Haven Communities. Affluent people and wealthy corporations will be desperately seeking locations to move their people, production facilities and support staff in the very near future. Real estate developers who provide them a safe haven for relocation will reap the benefits. Notably, the profit-oriented nature of these real estate developers will probably mean that wealthy companies and individuals will

be given highest priority in the Climate Change Haven Community construction efforts. Those persons and businesses with fewer financial assets will be lower in priority for transfer to safer climate areas. This will very likely lead to tragic futures for hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions, of American citizens.

It is hoped that the issues raised in the present study can serve as foundations for planning migration strategies within Europe and Asia, which are confronting the same challenges as the United States.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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