



ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH AND STUDIES CENTRE

Annual Report 2006/2007

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Environmental Research and Studies Centre

Throughout University of Alberta's history, many researchers working in the natural and social sciences have produced important and exciting research on environmental issues. However for many years, working in separate departments and faculties, they had no way to coordinate their shared interests. To address this need, in July 1990, the ERSC was formed. Since then, the ERSC has been instrumental in coordinating, promoting and disseminating interdisciplinary exchange and research on campus, in Edmonton and Alberta, and more broadly, throughout the environmental studies community.

As a free-standing institute of the university, the ERSC acts as a hub, providing any required support or information to individuals and facilities conducting environmental research on campus. We maintain a website where people can access information about all the ERSC's programs, along with information about environmental researchers, studies, programs and courses underway at the UofA, as well as other national and international institutions.

To encourage and facilitate the sharing of groundbreaking information about the environment and to increase the environmental literacy of students, faculty, and the public, the ERSC organizes a lecture series. Leading researchers present their work on various issues such as pollution, water, forestry management, and wildlife conservation.

The ERSC is a non-profit institute of the University of Alberta, reporting the Faculty of Agriculture, Life and Environmental Sciences. Our membership includes all students and faculty of the University of Alberta. Any

member of the university community is welcome to provide input into ERSC programs.

Debra Davidson, Associate Professor, Environmental Sociology, was appointed Director of the Centre September 2006. During this period, Debra led the development of the new business plan and worked with an Executive Committee, as well as a newly formed Advisory Board, to plan new programs.

Our manager Beverly Levis, has provided ERSC with administrative and program leadership for over 13 years. During this period ERSC has grown in programming content and scope, earning recognition and respect across the university and the wider community.

The Advisory Board is appointed by the Vice President (Research) and is comprised of Faculty members and Students at the University of Alberta, who volunteer their time to contribute to ERSC operations and activities. Most Faculties on campus are represented. The Board consists of several Committees, including the Executive, Campaign, Outreach, and External Relations Committees.

MISSION

- » Disseminate research findings in a way that maximizes meaningful dialogue among scientists and non-scientists to build capacity for better environmental decision-making – from the level of the individual to the level of the global institution;
- » Contribute to the improvement of environmental wellbeing and citizenship at the regional, national and international scale by

collaborating with other organizations in bringing relevant environmental sciences and studies research to bear in targeted environmental improvement campaigns, such as campus sustainability;

- » Support instruction and training in regional educational institutions that integrates research in environmental science and studies.

FOCUS AND PURPOSE

In keeping with its renewed mission to effect meaningful change, the strategic objectives of ERSC are to:

- » Enable Environmental researchers at the University of Alberta, along with their collaborators at other academic institutions, to be proactive in meeting emerging environmental education and research needs.
- » Improve decision-making by governments, municipalities, and citizens by functioning as a gateway to various pools of experts and up-to-date research on environmental issues.
- » Increase awareness and improve environmental literacy among students, staff, the general public, government and non-governmental organizations, business, and other academic institutions.
- » Foster improved interdisciplinary collaboration for research and teaching on environmental issues at the University and other academic institutions in Alberta by providing a forum for discussion and information exchange for the environmental expertise in Alberta's post-secondary institutions.
- » Influence University of Alberta administrators on policy decisions that may have an impact on the environment.

Capacity Building

In keeping with its focus and purpose ERSC allocated funds and resources to support the following activities. These activities provided learning opportunities for environmental researchers, students and faculty at the U of A, and members of the private and public sector across Canada.

RESEARCH FROM POLE-TO-POLE

To celebrate the appointment of a new Director and Advisory Board to the Environmental Research and Studies Centre, a special event was held featuring Dr. John Priscu (Montana State University) and Dr. Warwick Vincent (University of Laval). Dr. Priscu has 25 years of field experience in Antarctica and is currently acting as a convener for the international group of specialists to plan the exploration of Lake Vostok and other sub glacial lakes. Dr. Vincent is a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand. His current research concerns the effects of climate on high latitude lakes, wetlands and rivers and coastal seas.

Dr. John Kennelly opened the event and welcomed ERSC to its new Faculty—Agriculture, Life and Environmental Sciences. The lecture titled *Climate Change and Aquatic Ecosystems Pole-to-Pole*, focused on research in extreme conditions and the findings of this research.

WATER—A WORKSHOP, ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION AND PUBLIC EVENT

May 2007, ERSC and MUNK Centre, University of Toronto hosted a conference in which 60 prominent Canadians including the mayors of Edmonton and Fort McMurray and the leaders of First Nation federations debated a critical paper on oil sands

development at the University of Alberta. The workshop paper was prepared by University of Alberta professors David Schindler and Vic Adamowicz. The paper titled, *Running Out of Steam? Oil sands development and water use in the Athabasca River-Watershed: Science and Market-Based Solutions*, addressed the scarcity of water for oil sands development as well as practical market-based options for water conservation. In the fall Dr. Schindler and Dr. Vic Adamowicz presented their paper in a well attended public lecture.

DISTINGUISHED LECTURES ACROSS DISCIPLINES

ERSC hosted two special events. The well know Canadian poet, — often heard on CBC radio — Dr. Jan Zwicky, from the University of Victoria gave a poetry reading from her published work, *Songs for Relinquishing the Earth*. And, Mr. Chris Harris, a nature photographer gave the audience a visual treat by showing a selection of photographs from his newly published book, *Spirit in the Grass*.

ERSC also organized two lectures and a round table discussion for Professor Jamie Benidickson, University of Ottawa featuring his newly published book, *The Culture of Flushing, a social and legal history of sewage*. This book is essential reading for those concerned with protecting water quality and the environment.

BUILDING VIRTUAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES USING VIDEO CONFERENCING TECHNOLOGY

ERSC launched a new initiative to build virtual learning communities within Edmonton and Alberta, while at the same time, being environmentally-

friendly by lowering the carbon footprint of professors who would otherwise be physically travelling to Alberta classrooms by land or air.

Using video-conferencing systems, the goals are:

- » To provide school teachers Lunch and Learn opportunities.
- » To provide high school students the opportunity to speak with environmental experts at the U of A.
- » To provide student in grades 4 and 5 the opportunity to go on virtual field trips.

This initiative will also cut travel costs for schools who otherwise couldn't afford to take field trips to the U of A to learn about the latest environmental research at the U of A.

The first element in this initiative is the launch of Lunch and Learn sessions for teachers, in which U of A experts speak with teachers on selected environmental topics using the video technology during 45-minute spots. The first speaker to launch the series was John Acorn "The Nature Nut" who is a contract instructor in the U of A Department of Renewable Resources.

There will be a half-dozen additional Lunch and Learn sessions for the new year and starting in December the team will be working on developing a class-mentoring program, focused on climate change.

DEVELOPING A VISUAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Website

ERSC is working with students in the department of Visual Communication Design to design a communication strategy for the Centre. ERSC met with the students who will be working as a

Message from the Director

class project to develop a new visual communication strategy. Results are expected in April 2008.

Research Journal

Publication of the ERSC student research journal, *Partners in Stewardship* was suspended. Plans to redesign and refocus this publication are underway. *Green Spheres* is the proposed name of the new electronic newsletter, which will feature articles exploring contemporary environmental issues in depth; brief highlights of recent environmental news; articles featuring environmental science or studies projects conducted by a University researcher in Alberta; and an essay contest.

SUPPORTING OTHER UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

Interaction with Students

- » Students contact ERSC to discuss:
- » Employment opportunities;
- » Internal and external environmental events; and,
- » Environmental programs, courses and research at the University of Alberta and around the globe.

Responding to public inquires

- » ERSC continues to be a contact for public and students requesting information about environmental issues.

Media and Information Services

- » Members of the media contact ERSC to request names of resident experts on various environmental issues.
- » In the spirit of co-operation and collaboration, ERSC sends out notices to its extensive contact list about environmental events and learning opportunities sponsored by other groups within the environmental community.

The 2007 year was a particularly busy and exciting time for the Environmental Research and Studies Centre for the Director, Manager and our full complement of new Advisory Board members. We will look back on this time as a period of rejuvenation, re-visioning and growth. We have convened a new and dynamic Advisory Board with broad campus representation, while also adding two important elements missing from previous Boards—student members and one member from an external academic institution. This new Board of enthusiastic environmental researchers has invigorated the Centre and helped to redefine our Mission.

Our accomplishments for the year reflect our continued commitment to environmental literacy. We are especially pleased about the opportunity to increase environmental literacy in Alberta's Public Schools, by providing middle and high school student access to the University of Alberta's pool of environmental experts through distance learning. As well, the year's activities reflect our Centre's new strategic direction toward pro-active engagement in particular areas of environmental improvement. Our support for the development of an interdisciplinary synthesis report authored by two of the University of Alberta's top scientists on the state of current knowledge on water use and oil sands development in Alberta has already been well-received by the policy community. The workshop held to discuss this report with key stakeholders was a tremendous success. In the context of these activities, we have expanded our relations with other organizations, such as the Munk Centre, at the University of Toronto, and Alberta Public Schools.

We are all looking forward to 2008 as we continue to pursue our newly-defined strategic objectives. The much-anticipated deployment of our new e-newsletter in the early part of the year, as well as several distinguished lectures, will mark our upcoming months. In addition, we hope to expand on our contributions to campus sustainability through collaborative campaigns with other University organizations, and secure external sources of funding.

Executive Committee

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Associate Professor Rural Economy

Vic Adamowicz,
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Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences

Dave Schindler, Killiam Professor of Ecology,
Dept. Biological Sciences, Faculty Science

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Dept. Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, Faculty Science

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