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## Early winter has backyard rinks, Laurier's RinkWatch project in full swing

WATERLOO – An unusually wintery November has Canadians skating on backyard rinks much earlier than last year. And that's great news for the Laurier researchers behind RinkWatch, a research project that uses outdoor rinks to study winter weather conditions and climate change.

Earlier this week, backyard rinks in Edmonton, Lloydminster and Brandon reported good skating conditions to the RinkWatch website, with many rinkmakers in Ontario already flooding their rinks in hopes of skating soon.

"At this pace, the outdoor skating season looks to be starting roughly two weeks earlier than last winter across much of Canada," said **Robert McLeman**, an associate professor of Geography and Environmental Studies at Laurier and one of the researchers behind RinkWatch.

Entering its third winter, the RinkWatch project asks backyard rinkmakers in Canada and the northern United States to mark their location on an [interactive online map](#) – found at [rinkwatch.org](http://rinkwatch.org) – and provide updates of skating conditions throughout the winter. Researchers at Laurier use the data to do fine resolution mapping of winter temperatures and track year-to-year progress of larger winter climate trends.

They also find it helps stimulate a wider public discussion about the potential impacts of climate change on cherished outdoor activities like skating.

Over 1,000 backyard and neighbourhood rinks have participated in the RinkWatch project over its previous two winters, and the [RinkWatch.org website](http://RinkWatch.org) has a busy discussion forum where outdoor rink enthusiasts share photos and rinkmaking tips.

Last winter, Laurier kinesiology student Ashleigh Frederickson surveyed RinkWatch participants to find out what motivates them to build backyard rinks. Her results showed that most backyard rinkmakers have children under 12, and share their rink with neighbouring families. Shinny is the most popular activity. Interestingly, most rink builders said they themselves did not have a backyard rink when they were kids, something the researchers plan to explore in greater detail this winter.

Among the additional resources being developed by the RinkWatch team for the coming winter include curriculum-linked learning activities for teaching primary school math and science.