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Funding helps Laurier researcher explore how citizen science influences environmental education

WATERLOO – Wilfrid Laurier University Assistant Professor **Christopher Lemieux**, along with colleagues at the University of Waterloo and the Churchill Northern Studies Centre, received Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) funding to look at ways to enhance environmental education across Canada through experiential learning. The funding was part of research investments announced June 3 by the Honourable Ed Holder, Minister of State (Science and Technology), to identify the most effective curriculum, methods of teaching and methods of learning to prepare Canadians for the 21st century.

With a focus on citizen science, Lemieux's project will address how to change environmental education experiences to help Canadians better understand and act on the growing challenges of climate change. His research explores the dynamics and triggers of change in linked human-ecological systems, and within this, interactions between science, society, decision-making, and policy-making.

The team will collect examples of citizen science initiatives from across Canada and evaluate the collective action outcomes of citizen science projects to assess the effectiveness of this work.

"I'm excited to be working with Churchill Northern Studies Centre on this project," said Lemieux, assistant professor in Laurier's department of geography and environmental studies. "Their mission to understand and sustain the North makes them the perfect partner to explore citizen science and climate change."

By examining the role of citizen science to promote capacity for collective action, Lemieux and his team are working to shift the focus from the responsibility of individuals to a shared responsibility that includes government, public, and private stakeholders.

When schools began offering environmental education in the 1960s, their central goal was to promote environmentally responsible behaviour through environmental literacy and individual action. Today, the spectre of global environmental risks like biodiversity loss and climate change requires a more collective orientation towards taking action.

"Not only is Laurier home to projects such as RinkWatch.org and other citizen science projects, but Chris Lemieux is examining how these projects produce better citizens and inspire lives of leadership and purpose through collective action," said **Deborah MacLatchy**, vice-president: academic and provost and acting vice-president: research.

The project, entitled "**Conceptualizing and evaluating transformative environmental education: Nature-based citizen science as a platform for experiential learning and collective action on climate change**," was awarded \$24,915. In addition to Lemieux as project lead, the project includes Mark W. Groulx, PhD candidate from the School of Planning at the University of Waterloo, and professor LeeAnn Fishback from the Churchill Northern Studies Centre.

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SSHRC's Knowledge Synthesis Grants combine or "synthesize" current academic knowledge, and make the information accessible to a broader audience. The grants provide resources for researchers to examine existing research emerging over the past 10 years to address future challenge areas.

SSHRC funding announcement: http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/news_room-salle_de_presse/press_releases-communiqués/2015/ksg-ssc-eng.aspx

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