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Laurier student receives W. Garfield Weston Award for Northern Research

WATERLOO – Wilfrid Laurier University student **Katherine Black** is the recipient of the 2016 W. Garfield Weston Award for Northern Research at the master's level. The award, presented by the Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies (ACUNS), honours academic excellence, high calibre research proposal, and commitment to northern research.

Black is working with Laurier Associate Professor **Jennifer Baltzer** in the Forest Ecology Research Lab and at a remote field site at Trail Valley Creek near Inuvik in the Northwest Territories. Canada's North is a unique and sensitive landscape facing unprecedented challenges. The W. Garfield Weston Foundation is a champion of northern research, raising the profile of northern science and positioning Canadian scientists to contribute in ways that are pertinent, timely and innovative.

"Our researchers are growing the long-term knowledge base of the changing North," said **Robert Gordon**, vice-president: research. "This support from the W. Garfield Weston Foundation speaks to the quality of our students and the strengths of our Government of the Northwest Territories – Laurier partnership."

Black previously held a Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) Canadian Graduate Scholarship and currently holds an Ontario Graduate Scholarship. Her research project will examine the climate-warming driven spread of green alder shrubs across the low Arctic tundra. This increase in the number and area covered by tall shrubs has implications for energy balance, water and nutrient cycles as well as plant variety. These changes are predicted to increase water loss through the shrubs, which may amplify local warming and reduce water run-off. However, the details of how these shrubs will change the local water system is unknown.

"I was thrilled to learn that I was selected for the award," said Black. "The support will allow me to concentrate more time and effort towards my graduate work. Understanding the drivers and limitations of shrub expansion is essential for predicting future tundra conditions and how these changes may affect the North."

Black is the third Laurier student in two years to win a prestigious W. Garfield Weston Award for Northern Research. Previous Laurier award winners include Ryan Connon, a PhD student, and Andrew Meideros, a postdoctoral fellow working at Laurier's [Centre for Cold Regions and Water Science](#) as part of the Laurier-Northwest Territories Research Partnership established in 2010.

For more information visit, forestecology.ca.

– 30 –