University of Lethbridge News Release

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University of Lethbridge signs Oldman Watershed Council's Southern Alberta Water Charter

The University of Lethbridge joined a host of individuals and organizations from throughout southern Alberta today in signing the Oldman Watershed Council's (OWC) Southern Alberta Water Charter, lending its support to the charter's vision of a healthy, resilient watershed where people, wildlife and habitat thrive.

"The University of Lethbridge is proud to support the Oldman Watershed Council and sign the Southern Alberta Water Charter," says U of L President and Vice-Chancellor Dr. Mike Mahon. "Over the last 50 years, our students, faculty and staff have played a very active role in promoting the importance of sustainability in our water supply. Whether it be through advocacy, work in the lab or in the waters of southern Alberta, the U of L has established itself as a leader in water research through the Water Institute for Sustainable Environments (WISE)."

The Water Charter is a voluntary pact encouraging individuals and organizations in the region to plan and perform their own watershed protection initiatives. Each signatory pledges to undertake a specific action in support of the charter's goals and vision.

The U of L, under the guidance of Dr. Joseph Rasmussen, Tier I Board of Governors Research Chair in Biological Sciences, has initiated a new research study as its specific action in support of the Charter. Rasmussen and his team are developing a drone-based approach to characterizing stream water temperatures relative to the requirements of trout. This study includes the use of a thermal, infrared camera mounted on a small drone that will allow researchers to identify cooler or warmer water zones within the watershed. These zones are related to aspects such as spawning and summer survival of trout species.

"This is a cutting-edge strategy to inventory stream water temperatures that are critical to trout and the health of our aquatic ecosystems," says Dr. Stewart Rood, a biological sciences professor and researcher on the project. "It provides a novel approach that could be applicable across Alberta and worldwide, and will be doubly useful with the likely warming from climate change."

This study is one of many ongoing U of L initiatives related to maintaining the health of the Oldman Watershed. Another action is the work of the Global Citizenship for Oldman Watershed Cohort. This group of six students, working with Dr. Shelly Wismath of the Liberal Education Program, is currently volunteering for the OWC and has been a key contributor in spreading the message about the charter and encouraging groups to sign the accord.

The group is also initiating its own project, Adopt a River, whereby they will work for eight hours on their designated section of the Oldman River near Taber, collecting garbage, conducting soil and water tests, documenting plants and taking note of any vandalism.

“We’re doing what we can to clean it up and help in whatever way possible,” says 20-year-old student Antoine Gendron. “We’re hoping our project will help bring awareness of local watershed issues to people in the region so they might become more careful in their use of water at home, at work and in their recreational activities.”

As well, Dr. Andrew Hurly, professor emeritus of biological sciences, has been on the OWC board for 12 years and currently serves as the Vice-Chair.

Activities associated with the Southern Alberta Water Charter will commence May long weekend and continue throughout the summer.

For more information on the Oldman Watershed Council, visit oldmanwatershed.ca.

For more on the U of L’s commitment to the Water Charter, visit http://www.uleth.ca/vp-research/oldman-watershed-council.

To view online: http://www.uleth.ca/unews/article/university-signs-oldman-watershed-councils-southern-alberta-water-charter

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