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Using X-ray vision to explore climate change in New Brunswick's forests

Nov 17, 2008



Mount Allison student receives top prize for research at the Atlantic meeting of the Canadian Association of Geographers

SACKVILLE, NB — Mount Allison University environmental sciences student Carrie White is taking X-rays out of the hospital and into the forest in an effort to learn more about climate change. And she's winning awards for this. The third-year student from Maitland, NS received top prize for best student paper at the 20th Annual Meeting of the Atlantic Association of Geographers, hosted at Mount Allison this fall.

Carrie's paper, which she researched with Mount Allison geography and environment professor Dr. Colin Laroque and Dr. Dan Smith, Director of the University of Victoria Tree Ring Lab, looked at various soft-wood species in the Sussex, NB area. These species were previously sampled by Mount Allison master's student Ben Phillips in the Mount Allison Dendrochronology Lab (the MAD Lab). Ben's research made headlines in 2005 when he discovered the world's oldest red spruce tree in New Brunswick, using dendrochronology — the study of tree rings.

Carrie took the research another step further using X-rays, the same as those used in humans, on the wood samples. She says, "The tree X-rays, taken at the University of Victoria, which houses the only machine for this in Canada, give us a way to get a different, closer look at tree rings. These images give a clearer connection between tree rings and climate predictor models (temperature or precipitation), giving us a better understanding of the effect climate change has had on our forests."

This field of study allows researchers to gain a better indication of past environments, which can help build better climate models in the future. Carrie's study examined over 100 years of data, providing a significant contribution to climate change research in New Brunswick forests.

Carrie is continuing her studies at Mount Allison and plans to pursue a career in environmental research following graduation.

Photo caption: Guy Vincent, president of the Atlantic Division of the Canadian Association of Geographers, and professor at l'Université

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Nov 17, 2008

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Nov 17, 2008

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Nov 14, 2008

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de Moncton, presents Mount Allison environmental sciences student Carrie White with her award at the 20th Annual Meeting of the Atlantic Association of Geographers, held at Mount Allison University this fall.

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