Research News
umanitoba.ca/research

In Brief

Canadian Psychiatric Association honours Harvey Chochinov

Harvey Chochinov, psychiatry, has been named as this year's winner of the J.M. Cleghorn Award for Excellence in Leadership and Clinical Research presented by the Canadian Psychiatric Association.

Chochinov, Canada Research Chair in Palliative Care, established the Manitoba Palliative Care Research Unit at CancerCare Manitoba and spearheaded the development of the Canadian Virtual Hospice. His work, which examines ways of preserving dignity at the end of life, has also been internationally recognized by the American Academy of Psychosomatic Medicine.

Upcoming

Smartpark Interactive Breakfast Speaker Series

Tuesday, November 28
7:30 a.m.
Smartpark Lobby Boardroom
'The Power 30' with
Ms. Annitta Stenning
Chief Administrator Officer
City of Winnipeg

'The Power 30' - is a networking and information-filled event for researchers, business and government. Moderated by Geoff Kirbyson of the Winnipeg Free Press.

Annitta Stenning is an executive with extensive experience in both the private and public sectors. Prior to her appointment as the City's CAO, she served as Chief Executive Officer of Ramboc Enterprises, an agricultural distribution company, and as President and Chief Executive Officer of CentreVenture, Winnipeg's downtown development corporation.

During her tenure at Ramboc Enterprises, the company was named one of Canada's 50 best-managed private companies for three consecutive years. Under her leadership, CentreVenture emerged as one of Canada's leading redevelopment organizations, successfully encouraging a wide range of municipal/business partnerships, which resulted in significant private investment downtown.

Annitta Stenning was educated at Confederation College and the University of Manitoba. In 2004, she was named one of "Canada's 100 Most Powerful Women" by the Women's Executive Network, and received the YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg Women of Distinction Award for achievement in business, trades, and the professions.

Seating is limited. Please email wiebe7@cc.umanitoba.ca or call 480-1434 to reserve your seat today.

Traditional knowledge is key

Zoologist working with First Nations communities

BY FRANK NOLAN
Research Promotion

For close to two decades, Terry Dick, zoology, has been studying river and lake ecosystems throughout Manitoba. He works closely with local First Nations communities in the areas he studies, and he is an outspoken advocate of incorporating local and historical knowledge into ecological research programs.

Dick, who holds a Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) Northern Research Chair in aquatic northern ecosystems, said he became convinced of the value of local knowledge while studying lake sturgeon in Manitoba.

"Historically, local First Nations communities got as much as 50 per cent of their protein from lake sturgeon, particularly in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and northern Ontario," he said. "When I began working with the local people, I found there was a wealth of very valuable information, particularly things like sturgeon spawning sites and nursery areas, which you could only know from having lived in the area for generations."

Dick wrote the initial status report on the lake sturgeon, which is now nearing completion. This once common fish, which can reach 300 pounds in weight and live for up to 150 years, is now scarce in Canada, and will likely be listed as an endangered species once the review of the report is completed this month. If that happens, Dick said, a detailed recovery plan will have to be put in place, and he believes local knowledge will play a key role in such a plan.

"I've been working with the Sagkeeng First Nation on a detailed study of traditional knowledge that would be critical for a lake sturgeon recovery plan," he said. "This report included the Anishinabe names of all of the traditionally used sites along the Winnipeg River, as well as stories related to the history of these sites, and all of this information relating to sturgeon biology is still in the community, from a First Nations perspective."

Photo by Frank Nolan

Zoology professor Terry Dick, NSERC Northern Research Chair in aquatic northern ecosystems.

Dick said local knowledge can provide information that would otherwise take years to collect, including the history of rivers and lakes, and the natural barriers that have played an important historical role.

"To develop a recovery plan, you need to know exactly how the natural system has been compartmentalized over time, from natural barriers as opposed to dams and other human influences," he said. "The local communities not only have all of this knowledge, they also have a very broad, holistic perspective of how the ecosystem works."

This big-picture perspective is something, Dick said, that is often missing in the way the average person looks at river and lake ecosystems. Most people who live in urban areas, he said, tend to view land and water as separate, and fail to recognize the very close relationship between them.

"When we build a big house on the river, most of us cut all of the trees to the water's edge because we want to look at the water," he said. "We forget that what we're doing is causing damage to the shoreline and everything else that goes on there. The land, the water, the trees, the grass and everything else are all connected. The vegetation is there for a reason, and when we remove it indiscriminately we're de-stabilizing the ecosystem."

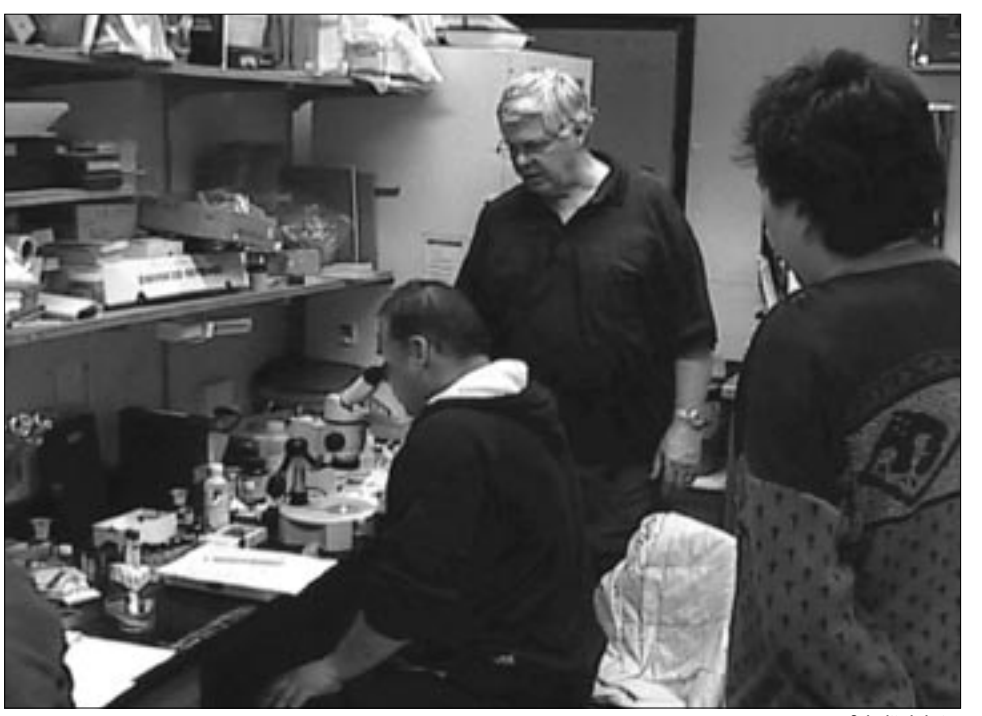
Dick is also committed to building capacity in the communities he works with. He is scientific advisor to Sagkeeng First Nations Department of Natural Resources (SFNDNR) and a member of the Winnipeg River Lake Sturgeon Board, initiated by the Sagkeeng First Nation, with representatives from Sagkeeng, Whitedog First Nation, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, the Province of Manitoba, Manitoba Hydro and Tembec Paper.

"The focus of the SFNDNR is capacity building, and a grant from Environment Canada to Sagkeeng has meant that equipment could be purchased and a study initiated on the Winnipeg River that deals with traditional knowledge and fish habitat below the Pine Falls dam," he said. "We have also had three people from Sagkeeng involved in fish management training in my lab at the University of Manitoba."

Dick is also working with the Fox Lake Cree Nation on the Nelson River to incorporate traditional knowledge into environmental impact statements for major projects like the Conawapa Dam. The goal is to ensure that long-term environmental monitoring will incorporate traditional First Nations values and perspectives. He is also working with Fox Lake on developing new economic opportunities for the community, including the possibility of setting up aquaponics operations, which would involve culturing both fish and vegetables in one location.

All of these projects, Dick said, recognize the critical role of traditional knowledge in scientific research and natural resource management.

"I strongly believe that traditional knowledge should be the foundation for all natural resource issues, whether it's sturgeon, water quality, or other environmental issues," he said. "That is the foundation, and we build the science on top of that. We need a broader perspective, certainly in terms of the environment, and if we don't, I'm not sure we're going to be able to solve some of the bigger problems."



Submitted photo

Terry Dick in his zoology lab with Kirk Guimont (seated) and Clifford Gerard from the Sagkeeng First Nation.

Research News is Published
by the Office of the Vice-President (Research)
Comments, submissions and event listings to:
stefaniu@ms.umanitoba.ca
Phone: (204) 474-9020 Fax (204) 261-3475