

**June 29, 2010**

### **Learning to Live with a Changing Climate**

“We need to close the gap between community engagement, research and climate change solutions,” urged Randy Letto, Executive Director of Destination Labrador, at a climate change workshop hosted by the Battle Harbour National Historic District of Canada last week and organized in part by Drs. Trevor Bell and Johanna Wolf from the Labrador Highlands Research Group at Memorial University. The main purpose of the workshop was to explore how climate change is affecting people’s livelihoods and well-being in southern Labrador and the Northern Peninsula and to discuss how communities can plan for a more variable climate. Members of the local Regional Economic Development Boards, community councils, educational institutions, and government and non-government organizations attended the two-day session.

“The extremely mild winter this year has given the people of Labrador and the Northern Peninsula a real sense of the local effects of climate variability and change. Nobody can rely on real Labrador winters anymore – we have to be prepared for a wider variety of seasonal conditions,” said Dr. Bell. “This was a great opportunity to highlight the importance of local and community knowledge of changing environmental conditions,” observed Ilana Alice, a community researcher working for the Labrador Highlands Research Group.

During the workshop, participants shared their observations of how increased storminess is damaging waterfront infrastructure on the Northern Peninsula and milder and drier winters are shortening the snow tourism season across the region. “It is clear now that sustainable tourism planning needs to incorporate climate change impacts and opportunities,” noted Gordon Slade, Chair and Managing Director of the Battle Harbour Historic Trust Inc. “We are committed to taking the important next steps.” ACOA representative Don Hogan observed that “climate change may also bring benefits to certain sectors of our economy – in agriculture and tourism, for example. As well, we have to look at new approaches to determining long term infrastructure requirements.”

The workshop participants also discussed how communities and organizations are responding to the effects of climate change and why it is important to learn from these experiences for future planning. “Climate change is a good reason to get communities to work together,” observed Sean St. George of the Red Ochre Regional Economic Development Board. Mr. Reg Hancock, Mayor of Forteau, pointed out that “we’ve got to factor in climate change if we are planning sustainable communities.”

The Battle Harbour sessions provided an opportunity to showcase current projects on climate change that involve communities in the region. Mr. Raymond Cusson spoke about climate change adaptation planning in the town of Glenburnie-Birchy Head-Shoal Brook and the win-win opportunities for the community. “Community planning involved everyone,” said Mr.

Cusson, the climate change coordinator for the project, “from firemen to school children and we were able to match the anticipated changes in our climate with people’s lives.” The community adaptation plan for Glenburnie-Birchy Head-Shoal Brook will be available later this summer.

The workshop ended with a commitment from local zone board representatives to host meetings for community councils to discuss how climate change may affect local businesses and livelihoods. The meetings will also focus on how communities can assess the potential role of changing climate in their day-to-day activities and long term plans. As one community leader put it, “in order for things to stay the same, a lot must change.”

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For more information contact:

Trevor Bell  
Labrador Highlands Research Group  
Geography Department  
Memorial University  
St. John’s, NL A1B 3X9  
Phone: 709-737-2525  
Fax: 709-737-3119  
Email: [tbell@mun.ca](mailto:tbell@mun.ca)