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Laurier's Cold Regions Research Centre hosts conference examining impact of climate change on Indigenous communities in the North

WATERLOO — Wilfrid Laurier University's 31st annual [Cold Regions Research Centre](#) Days conference will focus on the impacts of climate change on Indigenous communities in the cold regions of the world. The event, co-hosted by the Office of Indigenous Initiatives, will be held **Nov. 29** and **30** in the Senate and Board Chamber on Laurier's Waterloo campus.

The two-day event will include six panellists, including **Caleb Behn**, a Dene activist and environmental lawyer; **Joe Dragon**, deputy minister of Environment and Natural Resources in the Northwest Territories; and **Gladys Norwegian**, grand chief of the Dehcho First Nations in the Northwest Territories. There will also be oral and poster presentations from students, many of whom are Laurier students studying in Canada's North.

"Climate change is already causing rapid change and nowhere more than in northern regions," said **Jean Becker**, senior advisor for Indigenous Initiatives. "Research is critical to understanding the impact of the changes on the land itself, economic systems, as well as individual and community mental and emotional well-being."

The event's theme is also the subject of the international Northern Research Basin symposium, which will welcome scientists and Indigenous leaders from the world's circumpolar nations to Yellowknife in August 2019. [Bill Quinton](#), professor in Laurier's [Department of Geography and Environmental Studies](#) and director of the Cold Regions Research Centre (CRRC), will be presenting the findings of this year's CRRC's Research Days at the international symposium.

"The issues we're dealing with in the North — permafrost thaw and the resulting land cover change, new challenges to wildlife, the increasing frequency and magnitude of forest fires — are the same issues other circumpolar nations are struggling with too," said Quinton. "And there's the same disconnect between the decision-makers in the distant capitals, whether it's Ottawa, Washington, Oslo or Moscow, and the Indigenous communities on the northern fringes. We're trying to bridge that gap."

The panellists at the centre's Research Days were chosen to provide their unique points of view on how climate change (often coupled with industrial damage) has affected Indigenous communities and what steps should be taken in response.

- Jonas Antoine is a Dene elder and trapper from the Liidlii Kue First Nation in the Northwest Territories.
- Caleb Behn is a Dene activist and lawyer whose work has focused on fighting fracking in British Columbia. Behn is the subject of the CBC documentary *Fractured Land*.

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- Chris Burn is a professor in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies and the supervisor of Graduate Programs in Northern Studies at Carleton University and recent recipient of the Governor General's Polar Medal. His research focuses on permafrost in the Yukon and western Arctic.
- Joe Dragon is the deputy minister of Environment and Natural Resources with the government of the Northwest Territories and has worked in the territorial and federal public service for 25 years. He is a member of Smith's Landing First Nation.
- Ken Hewitt is a professor emeritus in Laurier's Department of Geography and Environmental Studies and a founding member of the Cold Regions Research Centre. His research focused on glaciers and climate change in the Himalayan mountains.
- Gladys Norwegian is the grand chief of the Dehcho First Nations, which represents 10 Dene First Nations and two Métis Locals in the Dehcho Region of the Northwest Territories.

The discussions will be moderated by David Livingstone, who has lived and worked in the Northwest Territories for nearly 40 years. The retired public servant chairs the steering committee on the partnership agreement between Laurier and the government of the Northwest Territories.

The **Cold Regions Research Centre Days** will take place on **Nov. 29** and **30** from **8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.** in the **Senate and Board Chambers** on Laurier's Waterloo campus. The event is free and open to the public. No registration is necessary.

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