

Press Conference Announcement

Contact: Gareth Thomson, Executive Director,
Alberta Council for Environmental Education
Cell: 403-678-7746
gareth@abcee.org

The Alberta Council for Environmental Education, the *Building Bridges, Crossing Boundaries International Eco-Conference*, and the University of Calgary invite you to a press conference **12:30 to 1:30 p.m., Friday, May 8 in the Blue Room, University of Calgary Dining Centre.**

Join...

- Eight students from University Elementary School's Kids Can Conserve leadership group, and their teacher Linda Smart
- Brant Parker, Principal of University Elementary and member of the 'Inspiring Education in Alberta' Steering Committee
- Karsten Heuer, Wildlife Biologist, Park Warden, Explorer, and Author
- Gareth Thomson, Executive Director of the Alberta Council for Environmental Education
- Dr. Mishka Lysack, Conference Co-Chair
- former principal Pat Worthington

We will release newsworthy new findings from a 2009 Ipsos Reid poll that sheds new light on Albertans' desire for more environmental education and action in Alberta's schools; and celebrate a student-led environmental action project. Please see attached press release and contact information.

Other notes:

- Interviews, video, and photo opportunities will be available on site.
- Backgrounder and full media package available at <http://abcee.org/about-us/polling>, or at the press conference.
- A media pass allowing free access to media may be obtained at the conference registration desk.
- Media are welcome to park free of charge on campus, except in 24-hour reserved spots, loading zones, handicapped stalls and fire lanes. If your vehicle is not a marked media vehicle, please leave a media business card in your window.

May 7, 2009
Contact: Gareth Thomson
Cell: 403-678-7746
gareth@abcee.org

Albertans want government to take more action on environmental education in schools

Improving the Elementary Science Curriculum an important step toward long-term sustainability, say environmental educators

Calgary, Alberta, May 7, 2009 —Albertans are becoming more aware of the serious consequences of environmental issues like climate change, and they want the government to do something about it – in our schools.

A new poll released today by the Alberta Council for Environmental Education (ACEE) indicates that an overwhelming percentage of Albertans want environmental education and citizenship skills taught in Alberta's schools. Two-thirds of Albertans believe that "more government action is needed to solve the environmental problems facing Alberta," and 75 per cent believe that "schools in Alberta should give top priority to providing students with opportunities to do environmental action projects." Support was high for projects such as neighbourhood clean-ups (90%), educating others about local environmental issues (78%), and presenting to politicians on environmental issues (67%, over two-thirds of Albertans).

Most Albertans also believe that environmental education should help students increase their environmental knowledge and understanding of environmental issues (81%), and build citizenship skills that can help develop solutions to our most pressing environmental issues (81%).

Unfortunately, polling indicates that Albertans are generally uninformed about important environmental issues. Less than half of Albertans claimed to know a great deal about any of the issues they were asked about, including global climate change (45%), urban sprawl around Alberta towns and cities (42%), pollution of water in Alberta (33%), and endangered species in Alberta (29%). The majority of Albertans (53%) incorrectly believe that "recycling all your paper and tins helps the environment more than moving to a smaller, more fuel-efficient home."

"Our research clearly shows that Albertans want the government to make environmental education a bigger priority in our school systems," says ACEE Executive Director Gareth Thomson, a former teacher from Canmore. "The good news is that there's a great opportunity to do this right now. It is imperative that the elementary science curriculum, which is under review as we speak, include more environmental education and opportunities for student action projects. If we want to build the sustainable society that Albertans – and the government – say they want, then we've got to make environmental education a bigger part of the curriculum."

The polling also shows a deficit in Albertans' skills and participation in public action to protect the environment: only eight per cent of Albertans say they organize community action to protect the environment as much as they can; just nine per cent write letters to the editor about environmental

issues to this degree; and only 14 per cent of Albertans say they communicate their concerns about the environment to their elected officials as much as they can.

“To solve environmental issues like climate change it is not enough to just change light bulbs, we need to change laws,” says Karsten Heuer, an award-winning author, biologist and conservationist who went to school in Calgary, and who is a keynote speaker at an international eco-conference at the University of Calgary this weekend. “I want my son to learn about what we need to do to solve our environmental problems and how his actions can make a difference. We really need to step up on this sort of education for tomorrow’s citizens if Alberta is to become a world leader in environmental sustainability.”

“Kids hear a lot about climate change, endangered species and other environmental problems in school, but they are commonly not taught what actions they can take to help solve them,” says Pat Worthington, former principal at Ralph McCall School in Airdrie. “Our schools need to ensure that a good education includes environmental citizenship. If we don’t teach our students how to look after the earth – their home – then we will have failed them.”

“Kids who get to roll up their sleeves and actually do something to help the environment walk away feeling hopeful about the future,” adds ACEE’s Gareth Thomson. “Action is a powerful antidote against the environmental despair that lots of people feel. Positive environmental action needs to be woven into *all* of our policies – including this new Kindergarten to Grade 6 curriculum.”

The implications of these polling results are being presented on Friday, May 8, as part of the Building Bridges, Crossing Boundaries International Eco-Conference at the University of Calgary. “The speakers at our conference emphasize that it is time to move from mere understanding of environmental issues to behaviour change,” says Mishka Lysack, conference co-chair and assistant professor in the University of Calgary’s Faculty of Social Work. “And an important part of that is to help people learn how to encourage government to ‘do the right thing’ to protect the environment.”

The poll results will be presented at a media conference held by the Alberta Council for Environmental Education as part of the Eco-Conference. The media conference will be held at 12:30 p.m., Friday, May 8 in the Blue Room, U of C Dining Centre.

Students from University Elementary School will also be present to describe the positive outcomes experienced through a recent environmental action project. All presenters will be available after the presentation for interviews.

Backgrounder and full media package is available at <http://abcee.org/about-us/polling>, or at the press conference.

For more information, please contact:

- Gareth Thomson, ACEE Executive Director: Gareth@abcee.org, 403-678-0079 (w), 403-678-7746 (cell)
- Jamie Duncan, Ipsos Reid: jamie.duncan@ipsos.com, or 403-969-3235 (w)
- Dr. Mishka Lysack, Conference Co-Chair: mlysack@ucalgary.ca, 403-220-7648
- Karsten Heuer, Karsten@necessaryjourneys.ca, 403-609-4173
- Pat Worthington, Rockyview School Division: worthington@rockyview.ab.ca, 403-945-4000 x 4006
- L.L. Smart, teacher, University Elementary School: LISmart@cbe.ab.ca, 403-777-6240
- Brant Parker, Principal, University Elementary School: blparker@cbe.ab.ca