

ACSRC DIRECTOR SPEAKS AT WILSON INTERNATIONAL CENTER

Excerpted from <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/emerging-scarcity-land-plenty-water-and-water-policy-canada>
To launch the Alberta Scholars Series on April 17, 2012 the Woodrow Wilson Center's Canada Institute invited Dr. Lars K. Hallstrom, ACSRC Director, to speak about water issues facing Western Canada, particularly the province of Alberta.

Generally, Canadians have viewed their country as an abundant land, filled with limitless resources. Hallstrom discussed how it might be difficult for some to imagine that Alberta, perceived as having such abundance, could reach "peak water." Using this term as a rhetorical tool to highlight problematic water usage issues, Dr. Hallstrom described the patterns of Canadian water use and how, if not altered, these practices could lead to severe water shortages in the future.

One barrier to an adjustment of water policy is the myth of limitless water. This fallacy, exacerbated by the abnormally wet century Alberta is leaving, is engrained in the minds of many Canadians—in particular, Albertans. In addition to the myth of abundance, the myth of water stability is an equally dangerous challenge to the province. Changing Albertan's thinking about water will go a long way to alleviating the resource stress of the near future.

A potential cause of a water shortage is Alberta's provincial water policy that features the "first in time, first in right" (FITFIR) system of water allocation. The system, which was used to encourage settlement over a century ago, allows water rights holders to use all of their allocated water without regard for local conditions. FITFIR has only exacerbated water shortages like Alberta's drought of 2004 and could lead to larger problems in the future.

In addition to Alberta's inefficient water policy, water use in the province has exploded. Due to increasing population and expanded exploitation of the oil sands, water is used more today in Alberta than at any other time. While this increased demand has caused greater stress on Alberta's water supply, the majority of water used in the province is for agricultural purposes.

As some of the oldest owners of land in Alberta, ranchers and farmers have the right, according to FITFIR, to withdraw 100 percent of their allocated water supply. Continued overuse of resources, when coupled with Alberta's inefficient rights doctrine and a provincial belief in water's immeasurability, could lead to an exhausted supply in the near future.

In order to better understand water stress, the distinction must be made between water consumption and water withdrawals, the latter being used industrially and with a less permanent effect (because much of the water is returned to the source) than water consumption from personal use and agriculture. Promoting a better understanding of water use around the globe would go a long way to alleviating these issues in the future.

Asked about alternatives to the FITFIR system, Hallstrom said that while FITFIR was probably impossible to get rid of altogether, new water transfer mechanisms have helped ease some of the water waste in the region. He also addressed a question about First Nations and a potential water crisis stating that some First Nations communities were beginning to experience water shortages and decreases in quality. Those issues signal wider problems for the province in the future.

Contact us: 4901-46 Avenue, Camrose, AB T4V 2R3 | P: 780.679.1672 |

E: acsrc@ualberta.ca | [@ACSRC](https://twitter.com/ACSRC) | [f UofA.ACSRC](https://www.facebook.com/UofA.ACSRC) |

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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA ALBERTA CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL COMMUNITIES

RESEARCH NEWS AND INFORMATION

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WATER POLICY INNOVATION FORUM

In August, the Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities (ACSRC) will be bringing together researchers, policy actors and representatives from specific watersheds to bring greater clarity and collaborative capacity to collectively recognizing:

- (1) the multiple dynamics and functions that complicate watershed-level analyses, programming and public policy;
- (2) the need to acknowledge and work within watersheds in a fashion that acknowledge integrative watershed management and planning;
- (3) the need to better and more clearly address a core issue of both horizontal (across policy domains) and vertical (across levels of authority or governance) integration that is often acknowledged rhetorically, but is rarely and explicitly included in policy-making and programming in Canada.

This event will take place on August 9th and 10th at the Norsemen Inn (6505-48 Ave) in Camrose, Alberta.

This forum is supported by a steering committee of faculty and staff from the Augustana campus of the University of Alberta and the University of Northern British Columbia. Financial support is provided by a 2012 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) grant, as well as from the ACSRC and University of Alberta.

Registration is \$50 (including tax). For information on accommodations in Camrose and to register, please visit www.augustana.ualberta.ca/research/centres/acsrc. Please note: space is limited; registration will close when capacity is reached or on July 6, 2012.

NORTHERN ALBERTA CONTINUING CARE EVENT

On April 3, 2012, the ACSRC and the Institute for Continuing Care Education and Research (ICCER) hosted their fourth networking event in Northern Alberta (Slave Lake) to discuss local issues in continuing care. Representatives from Slave Lake and High Prairie, including local health care providers, municipal representatives, and local citizens, participated in the day long discussion. This event was preceded by events in Fort McMurray and Grand Prairie in May 2011.

For more information on these events, please visit

<http://iccer.ca/ccne.html>

This project has received financial support from the Alberta Rural Development Network



PROJECT LOOKS TO IDENTIFY AB'S TOP 20 RURAL POLICY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The ACSRC conducted a research project to identify the top 20 research questions that can inform public policy in rural Alberta. Invitations to submit policy questions via an online interface were distributed via email in October 2011 to a wide range of organizational representatives working in rural research, policy and development across the province of Alberta. Invited participants were encouraged to circulate the online form within their organization, or to other organizations you feel should contribute.

Following the completion of the data collection phase, the ACSRC hosted a one-day workshop at the Augustana Campus on February 24, 2012. During the course of the workshop, participants from research, policy, non-governmental and rural communities engaged in an internationally recognized consensus-based exercise that generated a list of top rural policy research questions in Alberta from an edited list of submissions collected.

The results are currently being analyzed and may help researchers focus on projects that contribute to how rural Alberta is able to adapt to change and better themselves in the areas of health, environmental, education, and many other factors. In a broader sense, it could ultimately result in improved public policy to promote community autonomy and resiliency in rural areas. The responses will be compiled and presented in a report. They may also be published in academic journals.

This project has received financial support from the Alberta Rural Development Network.

UPCOMING EVENTS

18th International Symposium on Society and Resource Management

Linking the North and the
South: Responding to
Environmental Change

University of Alberta - North
Campus, Edmonton, AB
June 17-22, 2012

Creating Rural Connections 2012 Conference and Tradeshow

Regional Realities
and Approaches

Olds College, Olds, AB
October 11-13, 2012

Hosted by the Alberta Rural Development Networks in partnership with the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation and Olds College

Growing the Bioeconomy 2012 Conference

Social, Environmental and
Economic Implications

Rimrock Resort Hotel,
Banff, AB
October 2-5, 2012

COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF INTEGRATED COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY PLANS (ICSP) IN RURAL ALBERTA AND CANADA

Since 2011, a research team, led by Dr. Lars K. Hallstrom and Glen T. Hvenegaard, has been collecting ICSPs in part to analyze the factors that determine the content and direction of these plans in Alberta and across the country. The team seeks to understand the role of community variables (eg. size, age structure, income levels, type of employment, gender ratio) in developing ICSPs and in influencing the relative emphases on sustainability plan objectives (3 dimensions: social, economic, ecological; or 5 dimensions: social, economic, culture, environment, governance). And understanding of these factors will help researchers and communities understand and potentially predict aspects of future ICSP development and implementation.

This project has received financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the Alberta Rural Development Network.

UPDATE: ARDN WATER PROJECT

Commencing in the Fall 2011, Dr. Lars K. Hallstrom's ARDN-sponsored water research project began examining how rural communities have managed to balance water usage with commercial and population growth. To date this project has identified over 500 Alberta water projects and initiatives. As the project moves forward, it will continue to identify, synthesize and categorize the multiple strategies and initiatives that have been undertaken within Alberta to reconcile the pressures of economic and population growth with issues of water supply and policy. A project workshop is currently being planned for late Summer/early Fall 2012.

As water availability and usage become issues of concern in the province, the University of Alberta is leading the way in finding success stories to help find better ways to handle a precious and dwindling resource. As a result, Dr. Hallstrom's project was profiled across the U of A via the Universities homepage, the Augustana Campus homepage, ALES Tales (Faculty of Agricultural, Life & Environmental Sciences Newsletter), and Momentum (Department of Resource Economics and Environmental Sociology Newsletter).

This project has received financial support from the Alberta Rural Development Network.

