



ROCKY MOUNTAIN OUTLOOK

Hydrology course establishes Bow valley as national centre

By Lynn Martel - Rocky Mountain Outlook

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Students and professionals converged in Kananaskis Country last week to participate in an intensive course on the physical principles of hydrology – the first of its kind in four decades.

Hydrology is the scientific study of the properties, distribution and circulation of water on earth – on the surface, below ground and in the atmosphere.

Taking place at the University of Calgary's Biogeoscience Institute Barrier Lake Station, the course was hosted by the University of Saskatchewan's Centre for Hydrology in partnership with the Canadian Society for Hydrological Sciences.

Running March 2-11, the for-credit course drew 40 grad students from the universities of Lethbridge, Regina, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and B.C.'s Simon Fraser, as well as professionals working as environmental assessment specialists, design engineers, environmental technicians, hydrometric technicians, water resource managers, streamflow forecasters and hydrogeologists with employers including Ducks Unlimited, Alberta Environment, Environment Canada and Syncrude.

The jam-packed agenda included full-day classroom sessions covering topics such as the fundamentals and physical principles of hydrology, precipitation and snow hydrology, the hydrology of glaciers, wetlands and groundwater, interception and evapotranspiration, infiltration and soil water, river networks, river hydraulics and ice.

The course also involved two outdoor laboratory sessions at the U of S's Marmot Creek Research Basin. Course instructors included professors from the universities of Alberta, Calgary, Saskatchewan, Waterloo, Carleton, Simon Fraser and Sir Wilfrid Laurier.

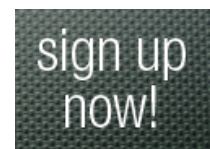
"We wanted to hold this course because we felt it would help communicate many of the practical implications of the recent scientific discoveries in Canadian hydrology to the practicing community, such as consulting engineers and water managers," said Dr. Chris Spence, president of the Canadian Society for Hydrological Sciences.

"I believe they (the students) are all here to improve their understanding of the science of hydrology so that they can make better, more informed decisions at work. Some also believe it will help their employability. Some also came for the networking. In the end, we hope it leads to better decision making and improved water management."

The course, which filled up quickly and generated an eight-person waiting list, was the first of its kind in Canada since the 1960s, said Dr. John Pomeroy, head of the

U of S's Centre for Hydrology and one of the key organizers of the course.

"This is the first one (hydrology course) since the 1960s when the University of Saskatchewan gave a course on the 'familiarization with the principles of hydrology' over several years as part of the International Hydrological Decade," Pomeroy said. "The first U of S course was attended by water managers and academics from across the country and is partly credited with starting up the science of hydrology in Canada."


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For Pomeroy, who relocated to Canmore with his family and several key members of his department last summer to be closer to his research sites at the Rockies' headwaters of several key Western Canadian rivers, hosting such a course in the Rockies has helped to establish the Centre for Hydrology as a national training centre for the science of hydrology.

"It has strengthened our base in the Bow Valley to expand beyond research to training," Pomeroy said. "The University of Saskatchewan is now seen as the university offering national scale hydrology training in Canada, and one that does this on a cooperative basis with the universities of Calgary, Carleton, Wilfrid Laurier, Alberta, Simon Fraser and Waterloo - all delivered in the Bow Valley."

Having the course hosted in the Bow Valley doesn't just raise the profile of the U of S's Centre for Hydrology, Pomeroy said, but also increases the number of post-secondary courses offered in the area, adding to several courses already being run out of the U of C's Biogeoscience Institute Barrier Lake Station. Currently, the U of C has made one of its Barrier Lake station buildings available to the U of S as a base for the Centre for Hydrology.

"This expands the university-level course offerings in the Bow Valley and brings in students and professionals from across the country to see what is happening here to our water resources, our climate, snow and ice," Pomeroy said. "This helps establish Canmore as the snow and ice research and education nexus for Canada."

Creating a hydrological research and educational centre in the Bow Valley will also likely generate economic benefits as some of the students plan to return with their families to visit and recreate in the Rockies.

"We have students from coast to coast and the U.S. here in these lovely surroundings and with Marmot Creek Research Basin and other Rockies sites nearby for the field component of the course," Pomeroy said. "Also, the (Biogeoscience Barrier Lake station is a special place with a great atmosphere and facilities that make it a great pleasure to teach and learn there."

Overall, Pomeroy said he was thrilled to be hosting the course and to have such an encouraging turnout.

"We are very impressed by the quality of students and professionals that are taking the course," Pomeroy said. "And we were astonished at the response to the course. There is a great interest in having us offer it in subsequent years and we are starting plans to make this an annual event, and even expand the offerings to include a hydrological modelling course and a hydrological field measurements course. It's terrifically exciting to host this course here."

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