

## What's New?

Keep up to date with new initiatives and activities that are fostering research and practice pertinent to EcoHealth readers. In this issue, you can find out about:

- Ecosocial Approaches to Health — A New Project of FIOCRUZ, Brazil
- Urban Landscapes, Conservation, and the Ecology of Emerging Diseases
- Global Ecological Governance for Eco-Justice and Public Health

Regular updates are also available at the EcoHealth website: <http://www.ecohealth.net>

### **ECOSOCIAL APPROACHES TO HEALTH — A NEW PROJECT OF FIOCRUZ, BRAZIL**

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The Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) is taking new steps to develop its interdisciplinary approach to environmental health research. A new integrating focus is the “Ecosocial Approaches to Health” project which joins researchers working within different environmental and health contexts and addressing both urban and rural issues, including slums, pesticides, industrial pollution, and infectious disease risks such as schistosomiasis. The project emphasizes methodological issues related to public engagement and environmental justice, as central themes for addressing these environmental health issues in Brazil. The “Ecosocial Approaches to Health” project helps to foster the overall mission of FIOCRUZ as an organization linked to the Brazilian Ministry of Health, that fosters development in health sciences and technology, including activities in basic and applied research, teaching, and vaccine production.

During June 29–July 2, 2004, FIOCRUZ held a symposium to cultivate ecosocial and ecosystemic approaches re-

lated to public health problems. Two seminars on ecosystem approaches to health by Dr. David Waltner-Toews (University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, Canada) provided a platform for FIOCRUZ researchers and students to share and discuss methods from their own projects, including initiatives within the “Ecosocial Approaches to Health” project. An important outcome of the meeting was the identification of opportunities to increase collaboration between FIOCRUZ, Canada, and other Latin-American institutions working on ecosystem approaches to human health.

For more information regarding these initiatives, see <http://www.ecosocial.fiocruz.br> (available only in Portuguese), or contact Marcelo Firpo Porto, e-mail: [fiocruz@ensp.fiocruz.br](mailto:fiocruz@ensp.fiocruz.br) or David Waltner-Toews, e-mail: [dwaltner@uoguelph.ca](mailto:dwaltner@uoguelph.ca)

### **URBAN LANDSCAPES, CONSERVATION, AND THE ECOLOGY OF EMERGING DISEASES**

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An innovative symposium hosted by the Consortium for Conservation Medicine (CCM), Wildlife Trust, profiled important developments and perspectives on emerging infectious diseases at the 2004 Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) conference (New York, July 31, 2004). The symposium focused on urbanization, land use change, sprawl and encroachment as key anthropogenic changes driving emerging diseases in humans, wildlife and plant population declines, and biodiversity loss. The event drew together a distinguished group of international experts to provide timely synthesis of a new agenda for both public health and conservation. Highlights included Rita Colwell (former director of the National Science Foundation and associate editor of *EcoHealth*) discussing the role of water in global infectious disease and her thoughts on how ecological understanding of health provides a way to do “preemptive

medicine” Professor Andy Dobson (Princeton and *EcoHealth*) discussed how mathematical modeling of disease dynamics can help us understand everything from the diseases that plagued the original pre-biblical cities to the emergence of new zoonotic disease threats (SARS, Nipah virus, and others). Rick Ostfeld (Institute of Ecosystem Studies) discussed his work on landscape fragmentation, urbanization, and reservoirs of Lyme disease. Other speakers included *EcoHealth* editor Bruce Wilcox, co-editors Jonathan Patz and Alonso Aguirre, and editorial board member Gary Tabor. The symposium showcased new opportunities for collaboration between veterinarians, medics, ecologists, and conservation biologists. Case studies were presented that spanned the range of infectious and noninfectious diseases, from the ecology of West Nile virus in the US to data that show that rehabilitation of oiled seabirds can be remarkably successful. This symposium was followed by another hosted by the Wildlife Conservation Society on issues that link conservation programs to the health of wildlife and humans. This was the first time that a full day of the SCB meeting was dedicated to ecohealth and conservation medicine issues, and highlights the growing interest in the field. Submissions to *EcoHealth* and a book that brings together themes from the symposium are two proposed publication outcomes from the event. Related programs at future SCB conferences are also planned, including a special symposium in Conservation Medicine at the next SCB meeting in Brasilia in 2005.

More details regarding the July 2004 event are available at: <http://cerc.columbia.edu/scb2004/symposia.html>.

Updates can be found at CCM and Wildlife Trust websites (<http://www.conservationmedicine.org> and <http://www.wildlifetrust.org>), or contact Lisa Schloegel, e-mail: [schloegel@conservationmedicine.org](mailto:schloegel@conservationmedicine.org)

## GLOBAL ECOLOGICAL GOVERNANCE FOR ECO-JUSTICE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

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A conference of 28 interdisciplinary experts in ecology, law, ethics, economics, political economy, and public

health took place July 11–13, 2004 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Participants came predominantly from Canada and the US, and also from Australia, Costa Rica, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, and South Korea. The chief organizers were Laura Westra, Richard Westra, and Colin Soskolne. The delegates come together almost annually under the umbrella of the Global Ecological Integrity Project, for which Laura Westra is the driving force. New and returning delegates find these meetings an academic highlight, providing opportunities and impetus for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches to be put into practice.

The thrust of this year's conference was the need for an evidence base that would inform the development of legal instruments to better protect against environmental degradation. Meeting highlights included joining with The Earth Charter Initiative (<http://www.earthcharter.org/>) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Ethic Specialist Group of the Commission on Environmental Law (<http://www.iucn.org/themes/law/cel01.html>). Case studies of ecosystem approaches to health and governance issues were described from New Zealand, Mexico, and South Africa, and also in the context of international water law. A showing of the movie “The Corporation” raised provocative questions at the interface of law, democracy, public trust, and the judiciary—not least the vulnerability to corruption and greed. In his conference summation, William Rees focused on the incompatibility of the current pervasive growth ethic with our quest for a sustainable future. Rees called for a more critical appraisal of new technologies, which should be introduced not because “they can” but because they are justified on the basis of equity and need.

The 2005 conference is being planned for Venice, Italy in late June–early July. To be added to the e-mail distribution list for this group, please contact Colin Soskolne, e-mail: [colin.soskolne@ualberta.ca](mailto:colin.soskolne@ualberta.ca)