



**News Digest of the Canadian Association of Geographers**  
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**WLU's Simon Dalby on why Canadians aren't prepared for disasters:** Canadian headlines in 2013 told stories of disasters in many places. Frantic attempts to deal with the consequences ensued in each case; heroic efforts by emergency personnel and numerous volunteers brought out the best in many communities. But in each case the lack of foresight and preparation that led to so many personal tragedies was clearly in evidence. We still seem to have great difficulty learning from previous disruptions. Above all, these disasters emphasized that we have built a society completely dependent on and vulnerable to failures of our infrastructure. This year revealed that we have been very slow to think through the consequences of doing so. In particular, we go on simply assuming electrical supplies are guaranteed, and we repeatedly have difficulties when they are interrupted. The anger and frustration expressed by those left cold and dark over Christmas. While our federal government may wish to studiously ignore serious attempts to reduce our contributions to climate change, municipal governments, provinces and those involved in the construction and insurance industry can no longer ignore forecasts of more severe storms and unpredictable weather events. [Toronto Star](#)

**U Toronto and SFU geographers argue mixed neighbourhoods not always a good idea:** Cities are successful to the extent that they bring diverse people, of different backgrounds, together. So it seems to make sense that a healthy neighbourhood is one that includes a mixture of people. Implementing policies that encourage concentrations of people of the same background seems like a bad idea. This is particularly the case, it seems, when it comes to poorer communities. Many advocate increasing the "social mix" of such neighbourhoods, ensuring that they don't just contain poorer renters, but also include middle-class homeowners. Social mix is a popular policy, gaining momentum worldwide. Policy-makers believe that socially mixed communities are healthier, safer, and more vibrant, and will attract investment, tourism, and economic development. The problem with social mix is that it assumes an even playing field between people. However, people who have more resources, and stronger property rights, have a clear advantage. The uncritical adoption of social mix in the Downtown Eastside, therefore, could lead to the displacement of the many low-income renters who do not have secure tenancies. Social mix, in other words, could lead to social homogeneity. Ironically, then, creating forms of inclusionary planning that provide some protection for low-income renters, may be the only way in which downtown Vancouver can continue to be socially diverse. [Vancouver Sun](#)

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**McGill U's Brian Robinson describes how Beijing clean-water program offers lessons for cities:**

The brown, smog-filled skies that engulf Beijing have earned China a poor reputation for environmental stewardship. But a study by an international and interdisciplinary team of environmental scientists, including McGill University's Brian Robinson, has found that a government-run clean water program is providing substantial benefit to millions of people in the nation's capital. The study estimates that fertilizer runoff declined sharply while the quantity of water available to downstream users in Beijing and surrounding areas increased. In fact, the researchers calculated that people on both ends of the deal benefit: upstream landowners' ratio of benefits to costs is about 1.2 and downstream consumers of the water have about a 1.3 benefit-cost ratio. Altogether, the program has a benefit-cost ratio of 1.5. While overall the program is successful, the door-to-door surveys showed that the program is probably not as successful as it could have been. "Farmers appear to use some of the cash payout from the program to purchase extra fertilizers, actually undercutting the original intent of the program. So the behavioural response to these kinds of policies is actually quite important, and is usually not taken into account when programs are designed," said Robinson, an assistant professor of Geography at McGill and co-lead author of the study, with Hua Zheng of The Chinese Academy of Sciences. "To be effective, programs should take into account these household responses, and build in program flexibility," notes Robinson. Similar programs are already underway throughout Latin America and Africa. One of the key drivers of the PLDL's success, according to the researchers, was the government's willingness to adapt the program on the fly to meet the needs of the farmers. For example, while other compensation schemes have set hard long-term payout limits, when conditions in Miyun changed and farmers said they weren't being fairly compensated, China upped the payments. [McGill Newsroom](#)

**Concordia U's Damon Matthews - Le comptable de l'atmosphère:** À 38 ans, Damon Matthews est déjà une sommité dans le monde du climat. La Presse l'a rencontré à l'Université Concordia, où il occupe la chaire de recherche en sciences et développement durable. Comment en êtes-vous venu à vous intéresser au climat? C'était presque par accident. J'étais à l'Université de Victoria en sciences de la terre et océanographie quand je me suis intéressé au cycle du carbone. J'ai eu mon doctorat en 2004 avec Andrew Weaver [devenu député du Parti vert provincial]. Ensuite, mon post-doc à Calgary avec David Keith, qui est devenu un spécialiste de géo-ingénierie. C'était un endroit intéressant pour étudier les changements climatiques. Je me souviens d'un forum public sur le sujet où il y avait un fort contingent de climato-négationnistes. [La Presse](#)

**U Waterloo's Richard Kelly appointed as Associate Dean, Research:** The Faculty of Environment at the University of Waterloo has announced that Professor Richard Kelly, Department of Geography and Environmental Management, has been appointed as Associate Dean, Research for an initial term of three years, effective January 1, 2014. Kelly joined the Faculty of Environment in January 2006 as a tenured Associate Professor and was promoted to Full Professor in 2010. [U Waterloo Environment](#)

**McMaster U's Jessica Pilarczyk teams up to discover Sumatra coastal cave records stunning tsunami history:** The limestone opening, close to Banda Aceh, retains the sandy deposits washed ashore by huge, earthquake-induced waves over thousands of years. Scientists are using the site to help determine the frequency of catastrophes like the event of 26 December 2004. This is being done by dating the cave's tsunami-borne sediments, which are easy to see between layers of bat droppings. "The tsunami sands just jump right out at you because they're separated by guano layers. There's no confusing the stratigraphy," explains Dr Jessica Pilarczyk of the School of Geography & Earth Sciences at McMaster University. Dr Pilarczyk and colleagues have dug trenches through the alternating bands of bat guano and sand to piece together the cave's history. The scientists know they are looking at tsunami deposits because they can find debris in the sediments of seafloor organisms such as microscopic foraminifera. Only the most energetic waves could have lifted and carried this material into the cave. [BBC News](#)

## Hot Papers by Canadian Geographers

Alan Bond, Jenny Pope, Angus Morrison-Saunders, Francois Retief and Jill A.E. Gunn. 2014. [Impact assessment: Eroding benefits through streamlining?](#) Environmental Impact Assessment Review 45:46–53.

Thuan Chu and Xulin Guo. 2014. [Remote sensing techniques in monitoring post-fire effects and patterns of forest recovery in boreal forest regions: a review.](#) Remote Sensing 6:470-520.

Fes A. de Scally. 2014. [Evaluation of storm surge risk: A case study from Rarotonga, Cook Islands.](#) International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction 7:9-27.

Bronwyn Harris, John Eyles, Loveday Penn-Kekana, Jana Fried, Harry Nyathela, Liz Thomas and Jane Goudge. 2013. [Bringing justice to unacceptable health care services? Street-level reflections from urban South Africa.](#) International Journal of Transitional Justice. doi: 10.1093/ijtj/ijt028

Tooba Shakeel and Tenley M. Conway. 2013. [Individual households and their trees: Fine-scale characteristics shaping urban forests.](#) Urban Forestry & Urban Greening. doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2013.11.004

Eva Stephani, Daniel Fortier, Yuri Shur, Richard Fortier and Guy Doré. 2013. [A geosystems approach to permafrost investigations for engineering applications, an example from a road stabilization experiment, Beaver Creek, Yukon, Canada.](#) Cold Regions Science and Technology. doi.org/10.1016/j.coldregions.2013.12.006

Rita Winkler, Sarah Boon, Barbara Zimonick and Dave Spittlehouse. 2014. [Snow accumulation and ablation response to changes in forest structure and snow surface albedo after attack by mountain pine beetle.](#) Hydrological Processes 28:197-209.

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### Other “Geographical” News

**How the Harper Government committed a knowledge massacre:** Scientists are calling it "libricide." Seven of the nine world-famous Department of Fisheries and Oceans [DFO] libraries were closed by autumn 2013, ostensibly to digitize the materials and reduce costs. But sources told the independent Tyee that a fraction of the 600,000-volume collection had been digitized. And, a secret federal document notes that a paltry \$443,000 a year will be saved. The massacre was done quickly, with no record keeping and no attempt to preserve the material in universities. Many scientists have compared the war on environmental science to the rise of fascism in 1930s Europe. "You look at the rise of certain political parties in the 1930s and have to ask how could that happen and how did they adopt such extreme ideologies so quickly, and how could that happen in a democracy today?" [Huff Post](#)

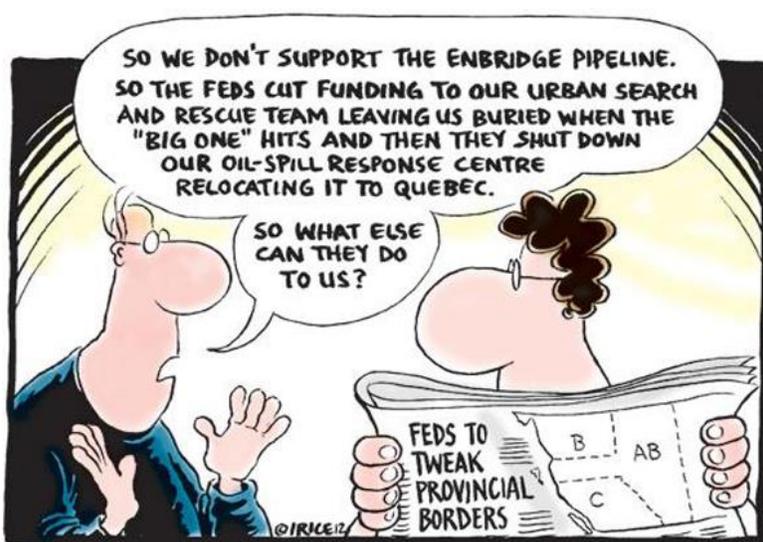
**Alberta Flood 2013: Comparing Canada's costliest natural disasters:** How does the flood that ravaged parts of Canmore, Calgary, Medicine Hat and that virtually swallowed up High River whole, compare to that other historic and very costly deluge, the one that besieged Winnipeg in 1997? Was what Albertans were experiencing in late June even as bad as the one that wreaked havoc on Alberta in 2005? Now, an interactive graphic compiled by Alberta Construction Magazine compares the cost of the 2013 Alberta flood to other massive natural disasters, such as the Quebec/Ontario ice storms and the Red River flood of 1997. [Huff Post](#)

**The most amazing, beautiful and viral maps of the year:** Great maps were everywhere in 2013. Some seemed destined to go viral. Some were stunning to see. Others had noble intentions and interesting stories to tell. Lots were made by people who aren't professional mappers. Here are some of our favorites. It's by no means an exhaustive list. [Wired](#)

**Exploding oil trains: Coming to a Vancouver neighbourhood near you?** CN Rail unloads oil wagons in Langley and the oil is then trucked to Chevron refinery in Burnaby. The company also transfers oil wagons to Burlington Northern/Santa Fe (BNSF) in New Westminster for transport into the U.S. [Vancouver Observer](#)

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### Some not so "Geographical" News



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