

Wolfville student part of Canadian delegation for climate change

by Wendy Elliott/The Advertiser

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Graduate student Thea Whitman, a Wolfville native, has been selected as one of the 30 members of the Canadian Youth Delegation (CYD) to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark Dec. 7 to 18.

Whitman, working on an M.S. in soil science at Cornell University, says she is honoured to return to the CYD after an inspiring and life-changing experience as part of last year's delegation to negotiations in Poland.

The non-partisan team of young Canadians ranges in age from 18 to 26 and plans to deliver a message of action and hope: the climate crisis is happening, but there is an opportunity for massive, positive change. Their work in Copenhagen will focus on inspiring Canadians and youth around the world to take individual action, Whitman says, pressuring governments to implement strong climate change policies and enhancing the global youth network on climate change.

"It is crucial that young people attend this conference," Whitman says. "Our future is on the negotiating table and, as key stakeholders, we need to ensure that our government acts as a climate leader.

"They must also be willing to negotiate with the rest of the world and come to an agreement that safeguards all peoples, not just Canadians."

This sentiment is echoed by Caroline Lee of Fredericton.

"Canada has gone from being a leader to being embarrassed at recent international climate negotiations. The first step here at home is to pass bill C-311, the Climate Change Accountability Act, which sets science-based targets for our country."

The bill is going through the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development right now, but needs to be passed quickly, she says, to ensure Canada has a credible plan in time for Copenhagen.

Climate change has shown itself to be far more than an environmental issue: it's a human rights issue. The consequences of climate change are already affecting livelihoods of people the world, Whitman says, including Canada's vulnerable northern communities.

"Copenhagen is the critical juncture on the way to the global climate change agreement that will follow Kyoto after 2012. It is imperative that the international community use this opportunity to ensure climate security and justice," says Whitman.

The Canadian Youth Delegation is a project of the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition, a united front of youth organizations. This year, the CYD is made up of 30 youth from all over Canada selected based on skills and experience. Delegates will travel to the Conference of Youth and the Conference of the Parties, both happening in Copenhagen this December.



Thea Whitman in Poland last November. She will be in Copenhagen in December doing work that can further climate change action