



Partner Perspectives

Foothills' core study area helps groom top researcher



Master's candidate Eileen Jones

Partner Perspective

UNIVERSITY OF
BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Dr. Lori Daniels,
Associate Professor,
Geography Department

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Overview

Lori Daniel's UBC students conduct research on coarse woody debris, such as standing dead trees and downed logs, and on large woody debris in streams, within the Institute's Natural Disturbance Program. She credits the Institute for research and multi-agency funding opportunities that in just five years have supported three Post-Docs, three Master's students, eight lab assistants and 10 field assistants. Three Master's and two undergrad theses have come out of the program.

Challenge

Fieldwork is an essential component of advanced learning and research. "Our students' theses are based 100 % on projects they have done out there in the forest," Daniels says. "We can't just rely on what others have discovered in the past, as what may be very effective in one place may not be elsewhere. We need to expand our knowledge, and we do that by going out and pushing the boundaries of our knowledge."

Solution

Students visit Foothills' 27,500 sq km core study area to gather data on the role of woody debris in carbon cycling, nutrient regimes and contributions to habitat for a vast array of aquatic and terrestrial creatures. Over and above the living lab, Foothills Research Institute provides access to a treasure trove of historical data, such as 50-year-old forest management datasets collected by Hinton Wood Products A Division of West Fraser Mills Ltd. Other introductions lead to funding opportunities at the provincial and federal level. The students also benefit from working with or having access to Institute program leads and researchers with global profile for excellence and innovation. "From the professional development point of view, our collaboration with the Institute's Natural Disturbance Program is instrumental for the students in our program," Daniels says.

Results

"The relationship with the Institute brings so many benefits," Daniels says. "Our grad students are being trained as professionals who work on research full-time, and this is just an excellent collaboration in terms of them being able to share results with industrial partners and national funding agencies. Also, having access to historical data is absolutely critical to understanding how environmental change is impacting ecosystems over the long term." Not all university students have the chance to present their findings and conclusions to senior industrial managers hungry for answers, Daniels says. "The Institute plays a really critical role in creating this reciprocal relationship, in which students can talk with land managers about how their findings might inform management decisions."

Learn more at www.foothillsresearchinstitute.ca