

Intact Financial and University of Waterloo Launch Nationwide Effort to Weather-Harden Cities

Implementation of 20 demonstration projects across Canada, including Ontario, will help communities adapt to climate change and extreme weather

TORONTO, July 3, 2014 /CNW/ - Intact Financial Corporation and the University of Waterloo today announced a national initiative involving the implementation of 20 climate change adaptation projects designed to reduce the physical, financial and social impacts of extreme weather events.

In Ontario, Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA) will deliver green infrastructure projects, such as channel naturalization and low impact development (LID) techniques for new and existing subdivisions, and Credit Valley Conservation will design, construct and showcase LID demonstration projects.

The frequency and magnitude of extreme weather events – from the floods in Southern Alberta and Toronto to the December ice storm in Central and Eastern Canada – are increasing, causing billions of dollars in damage to infrastructure, businesses and homeowners.

"Climate change is a reality, and the events of the last year clearly demonstrate the need to weather-harden our communities, our infrastructure and our homes," said Dr. Blair Feltmate, chair of the Climate Change Adaptation Project (CCAP) at the University of Waterloo.

The 20 demonstration projects were selected from 75 submissions made by conservation authorities and non-governmental organizations from across the country. The projects, which will be carried out in Alberta, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Ontario and Quebec, are aimed at showcasing viable and cost-effective adaptation solutions that ultimately will be replicated in communities across the country.

The projects emerged from CCAP's 2012 report that outlined a roadmap of priorities and recommendations to adapt to climate change. They will focus primarily on reducing the impact of torrential precipitation on municipal infrastructure through the restoration of urban wetlands and water channels, and the deployment of green infrastructure initiatives such as rain gardens, bio-swales and permeable surface parking lots and roadways.

Projects will also focus on efforts to limit coastal erosion in proximity to major cities. In addition to adaptation applied to infrastructure, education campaigns will promote practical measures that homeowners can engage around their homes to help stop basement flooding.

"As a society, Canada must adapt to the new climate reality, and ensure that our cities, communities, infrastructure and buildings are resilient to extreme weather," said Debbie Coull-Cicchini, Senior Vice President of Intact Insurance for Ontario. "This is a multi-stakeholder endeavour and we are thankful to the governmental agencies, NGOs and consumers that will participate in these projects. Together we will foster adaptation initiatives that will allow Canadians to better adapt to our changing climate."

Credit Valley Conservation will undertake school and residential projects in its watershed to help municipalities reduce flood risk. The projects will provide in-the-ground demonstrations of innovative stormwater management practices, called low impact development (LID), so rainfall and urban runoff can be treated on-site rather than draining into waterways through traditional storm sewers. These treatments mimic nature where rainfall absorbs slowly into the ground rather than being carried through storm sewers to watercourses.

"CVC is working with partners throughout our watershed to install low impact development practices as one way to help build resiliency against more frequent, intense weather," said Deborah Martin-Downs, Chief Administrative Officer of Credit Valley Conservation. "We are pleased to work with the Climate Change Adaptation Project, Intact Financial and the University of Waterloo to help design, construct and showcase LID projects. Residents and professionals can learn how LID practices work in different urban land uses. Ultimately, these projects will help cities and towns across Ontario mitigate extreme weather risks."

Toronto and Region Conservation will naturalize concrete-lined Spring Creek in the Region of Peel. The project will remove much of the concrete, return the creek to a natural state, and reconnect it with the floodplain, all of which will dissipate stress on the channel during high flows.

TRCA has made watercourse restoration a priority as many channels are approaching their engineered design life or, in some areas, are already past that point. Failing channels can lead to uncontrolled and extreme erosion and flooding that may place property and infrastructure at risk.

"Communities across Canada are under pressure to adapt to extreme weather risks. The demonstration of green infrastructure projects to address potential barriers to climate adaptation is at the forefront of TRCA's Living City Vision," said Brian Denney, Chief Executive Officer of TRCA. "We and our Ontario Climate Consortium partners are pleased to work with the Climate

Change Adaptation Project, Intact Financial and the University of Waterloo to ensure that actions are being taken to make our communities more resilient and better prepared."

TRCA's BRE Innovation Park at the Living City Campus in Vaughan will provide a platform to demonstrate innovative solutions to achieve cost-effective and low-maintenance design intended to serve as a model that can be easily replicated in new communities and as retrofits in existing ones.

A Bioretention System for Flood Risk Mitigation will combine the aesthetic landscaping of bioretention with the large volume storage and detention capabilities of an underground infiltration system to effectively manage stormwater.

Examples of projects that will get underway in other provinces in the coming months include:

- Green Calgary and Green Communities Canada will educate homeowners through the RAIN Home Visit Program on simple means to help flood-proof their homes, such as placing plastic covers over window-wells, ensuring that eaves troughs are kept clear, and that landscaping around homes directs water away from foundations.
- Nature-Action Québec will convert an alleyway on the island of Montreal, removing part of the asphalt, planting trees and vegetation, and adding lattice stone pavement to reduce flooding due to stormwater or sewer backups. This project will also help reduce heat island-related problems.

"Preparing for climate change is non-negotiable if we are to avoid management by disaster scenarios. Extreme weather events will continue to increase in frequency and magnitude," Feltmate said. "Adaptation is the only means to avoid financial and social costs that will otherwise be borne by all levels of government, industry and consumers."

The Climate Change Adaptation Project – funded in full by a grant from Intact Foundation and launched in 2010 – focuses on how Canada can adapt to climate change. The 80 experts who contributed to the project come from diverse backgrounds including academia, law, banking, insurance, NGOs, Aboriginal communities, utilities and more. The full report can be found here: www.adaptnowcanada.com

About the University of Waterloo

In just half a century, the University of Waterloo, located at the heart of Canada's technology hub, has become one of Canada's leading comprehensive universities with 34,000 full- and part-time students in undergraduate and graduate programs. Waterloo, as home to the world's largest post-secondary co-operative education program, embraces its connections to the world and encourages enterprising partnerships in learning, research and discovery. In the next decade, the university is committed to building a better future for Canada and the world by championing innovation and collaboration to create solutions relevant to the needs of today and tomorrow. For more information about Waterloo, visit www.uwaterloo.ca

About Intact Financial Corporation

Intact Financial Corporation (www.intactfc.com) is the largest provider of property and casualty insurance in Canada. Intact offers home, auto and business insurance through Intact Insurance, belairdirect, Grey Power, Jevco and BrokerLink.

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Media Contacts: Dr. Blair Feltmate, Chair, Climate Change Adaptation Project, University of Waterloo, 519-888-4567 ext. 38981, bfeltmat@uwaterloo.ca; Nick Manning, Director of Media Relations and Issues Management, University of Waterloo, 519-888-4451, 226-929-7627, nmanning@uwaterloo.ca; Gilles Gratton, Vice President, Corporate Communications, Intact Financial Corporation, 416-217-7206, gilles.gratton@intact.net; Chandra Sharma, Watershed Specialist & Senior Manager, Climate Programs, Toronto and Region Conservation, 416-661-6600 ext. 5237, csharma@trca.on.ca; Christine Zimmer, Sr. Manager, Watershed Protection and Restoration, Credit Valley Conservation Authority, 905-670-1615 ext. 229, czimmer@creditvalleyca.ca

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