

Sierra Youth Coalition comes to UPEI

The long standing environmental organization seeks members on campus

BY ERIN FAGAN

"There is a pressing need for the youth all over the world to take an active part in every level of decision making, since it affects their lives, and has far reaching effects on their future." - statement made at Rio Earth Conference, 1992.

The Sierra Youth Coalition (SYC) is a long-standing environmental organization whose national coordinator, Amelia Clarke, visited the UPEI campus this past week.

As a result of Clarke's regional tour, youth on Prince Edward Island have decided to initiate their own chapter of the SYC, which has been establishing chapters across Canada for just under two years.

Clarke held an information session in the Robertson Library on October 7, and spoke to a small group of students on campus concerning the environmental issues and campaigns with which the SYC is involved.

This visit followed the previous afternoon's presentation at Colonel Gray High School.

Clarke, a Mount Allison University graduate, would like to see university students here become more involved in environmental issues.

"If there is an environmental group here we can support them, help them grow stronger, join them with our network... we do a lot of idea-sharing," she said.

The Sierra Youth Coalition was formed in Canada a branch of the long-standing Sierra Club of Canada, which has been operating nation-wide for several decades.

With about 300 members nation-wide, the organization focuses on local and national environmental campaigns, on the education, networking and empowerment of youth, and on offering a voice for youth in policy-making in social justice

and environment issues.

"We're doing some amazing things right now that relate to campuses, and it might just be the ideas that people hear from me that get them going," Clarke continued.

The broader Sierra Club, founded in the United States in 1892 by writer and naturalist John Muir, was formed originally to protect the wilderness of the Sierra Nevada.

"This was at a time when there were no protected areas, and industrialization was increasing," Clarke explained.

Over the past century, the Sierra Club has been active with a wide range of issues, from climate change to the loss of biodiversity. It also sponsors activities to allow people to enjoy the outdoors in a variety of ways, such as nature-walking and boating, and to encourage preservation of protected areas around the world.

Clarke, while discussing her work with the SYC, pinpointed Girl Guides as the root of life-long interest in the outdoors and preservation.

"That got me camping, and then I fell in love with the woods and the lakes."

"I first joined a club in high school, and we did things like roadside cleaning and planting trees and recycling," Clarke said. "And when I went to Mount Allison, I became further involved. We hosted conferences and became involved in a particular campaign, and that is when I learned about how political structures work."

Clarke described her first major campaign in New Brunswick, as well as the difficulties faced while trying to ensure protection of the last stand of old-growth forest in that province.

She explained that she developed stronger tactics as a result of the hardships she en-

countered while working in New Brunswick. When she began work on a national level, she realized that there was no national youth environmental group. There was a need for such an organization, and, consequently, SYC was formed.

Clarke is hopeful that students will appreciate their role in the evolution of environmental strategies.

"Most people believe in environmental ethics and many

practice on a personal level," she said. "They need a marriage of these beliefs with activism... to take the next step and relate what you are learning in your courses or to create change in the real world."

"Things here on campus make a difference too... so it's important to create change here as well," she added.

For more information, look up the following: <http://www.sierraclub.ca/syc>

The first meeting of the Island SYC will be held on Tuesday, October 13, at 6 pm in the Basilica Recreation Centre (room 108). All youth, 25 years of age and under, who are interested in environmental issues are encouraged to attend. An interactive presentation related to World Food Day (Oct. 16) will be held immediately following the short meeting.

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- Restore transfer payments to 1993 levels
- Fund a tuition fee freeze
- Transform the Millennium Scholarships into grants
- Stop punishing students and end student loan bankruptcy discrimination
- Prohibit private, for-profit education: some things are not for sale

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