Stanford's Woods Institute awards new round of Environmental Venture Projects

EurekAlert

The Woods Institute for the Environment at Stanford University has awarded four new Environmental Venture Projects (EVP) grants for interdisciplinary research aimed at finding practical solutions promoting global sustainability.

Four faculty teams will receive a total of $787,013 over the next two years to tackle a broad range of environmental challenges, from the open savannahs of East Africa to the big cities of India.

The four projects were selected from an initial pool of 28 letters of intent submitted to the EVP faculty committee led by Scott Fendorf, professor of environmental Earth system science, and Elizabeth Hadly, professor of biology.

"The projects we're funding this year include 16 Stanford faculty, 11 of whom are new to the EVP program," said Fendorf, a senior fellow at the Woods Institute. "It's a true cross-section of the campus, representing nine departments in five schools Business, Earth Sciences, Engineering, Medicine, and Humanities and Sciences."

Thirty-seven EVP grants totaling more than $5.4 million have been awarded to faculty in all seven schools at Stanford since the annual program was established in 2004. To encourage broad faculty participation in the future, the Woods Institute will host its second annual EVP Forum on Oct. 1. The event will feature updates of recent projects and offer guidelines for developing competitive faculty proposals for the 2011 round of grants.

"Our goal is to provide support for truly innovative projects that are unlikely to get seed funding from traditional sources," Hadly said. "While interdisciplinary teamwork is important, we strongly encourage proposals that are solutions-oriented and transformational."

Here are the four projects awarded EVP grants this year:

- The Effects of Wildlife Loss and Land Use Change on Rodent-Borne Disease Risk in East Africa: This project explores whether the loss of large wildlife and changes in land use increase the risk of infectious disease in developing tropical countries.

  Principal Investigator (PI): Rodolfo Dirzo (Biology). Co-PIs: Michele Barry (Medicine) and Eric Lambin (Environmental Earth System Science/Woods Institute).

- Rethinking the Balance between Future Obesity and Malnutrition with Climate Change: The goal is to develop a computer model capable of evaluating nutrition-related health policies in India, taking into account the impact of climate change on agricultural production and food availability.

  PI: Jeremy Goldhaber-Fiebert (Medicine).

  Co-PIs: David Lobell (Environmental Earth System Science/Woods Institute), Bala Rajaratnam (Statistics), Walter Falcon (Economics), Paul Wise (Pediatrics) and Uma Chandra Mouli Natchu (Translational Health Science and Technology Institute, India).

- Can Better Management Raise Growth and Reduce Pollution? This EVP explores how better management practices in industrial plants can improve both energy efficiency and productivity. Stanford's Precourt Energy Efficiency Center will provide 50 percent of the funding for this project.

  PI: Aprajit Mahajan (Economics).

  Co-PIs: Nick Bloom (Economics), John Kunz (Civil and Environmental Engineering) and John Roberts (Graduate School of Business).

- Understanding the Carbon Cycle in Terrestrial and Marine Ecosystems with Field-Based Measurements Using a Revolutionary Isotopic Technique: To understand how climate and erosion affect the transport of carbon in freshwater and marine ecosystems, the research team will design a portable spectrometer using a novel technology that measures stable carbon isotopes in the field.

  PI: Richard Zare (Chemistry).

  Co-PIs: Joe Berry (Biology/Carnegie Institution); Page Chamberlain and Rob Dunbar (Environmental Earth System Science).

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