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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

MapChat creator travelling from New Zealand to attend Smithers conference

The creator of a Web-based mapping tool says the upcoming **Planning for the Crown-Settlement Interface Lands** conference, held June 16 to 18 in Smithers, is one of Canada's first and that the topic will become increasingly important.

"In fact," says Brent Hall with the School of Surveying at University of Otago in New Zealand, "conferences of this nature should be going on everywhere in the country." With less than 11 per cent of the country's land privately owned and the vast majority split between federal and provincial control, planning expansion of privately owned lands has never been more important, he says.

Hall, one of the foremost international experts on sustainable community development in remote regions, is the developer of MapChat, an interface planning tool used in the Bulkley Valley. By allowing users to mark a shared map with locations on local environmental, cultural and recreational assets, the software allows direct input into the planning process and helps to mitigate disconnectedness between official planning and citizen concerns, Hall says.

It has been used to assess affordable housing locations in Collingwood, Ont., by farmers in New Zealand considering community irrigation options, by archaeologists in the UK, and to study climate change impacts in the US.

"By far the most extensive use of the software has been in the Bulkley Valley," Hall says, noting that conference coordinator Ray Chipeniuk was an investigator for the original project and describing the valley as "one of the most involved communities I have probably ever encountered."

MapChat will be a large component of the upcoming conference, which seeks to provide a learning experience in planning land that straddles Crown and private property. These lands are valued by a diverse set of interests—including agriculture, trail users, residential development and local First Nations—making the Bulkley Valley an ideal location to host this precedent-setting conference.

Organized by adjunct professor Ray Chipeniuk, through the University of Northern British Columbia's School of Environmental Planning and in association with the Bulkley Valley Research Centre, the event is expected to draw urban and regional planners, academic researchers, planners working with First Nations, and members of citizen-based planning groups. It will be held at the Friendship Centre on June 16 and 17 and at the Old Church on June 18.

For more information, visit [www.bvcentre.ca/interface2010](http://www.bvcentre.ca/interface2010). Conference speaker Brent Hall can be reached at [brent.hall@otago.ac.nz](mailto:brent.hall@otago.ac.nz). Conference chair Ray Chipeniuk can be reached at 250.847.5758.