



**The Natural Resources and
Environmental Studies
Institute at UNBC and Canfor**

NRESI Lecture Series



Guest Lecturer:

Dr. William Rees

*Professor, University of British
Columbia, School of Community
and Regional Planning*

**“Let’s Get Serious about Sustainability
(or is it already too late?)”**

On 16 January 2006 James Lovelock, author of the Gaia hypothesis, wrote that “before this century is over billions of us will die and the few breeding pairs of people that survive will be in the Arctic where the climate remains tolerable.” In Lovelock’s view, humanity’s technological hubris has done us in, our attempts to manage the planet are failing and, in the face of accelerating global change, “sustaining” techno-industrial civilization is no longer a possibility. Other scientists, while not necessarily accepting the harsh finality of Lovelock’s gloomy prediction, share his basic diagnosis on the health of the planet. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) issued a “stark warning” to world leaders-indeed, to all of us: “Human activity is putting such a strain on the natural functions of the Earth that the ability of the planet’s ecosystems to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted.” In this presentation I examine the biological, cultural and biophysical factors that have driven modern society to the point where such “stark warnings” have become necessary. I then show why concepts and policies currently advanced under the rubric of “sustainable development” are so generally ineffective. Finally, consistent with biophysical and human behavioural reality, I outline a minimal set of ecological and socio-political conditions that would have to be met for true sustainability. Getting serious about sustainable development will require an unprecedented display of both deep compassion and hard cold reason as the international community considers the dire implications of our prevailing growth-based global development paradigm. Abandoning core cultural values, beliefs and assumptions that have become maladaptive may be wrenchingly difficult but it is also necessary if humankind is ever to become, in Lovelock’s words, “..the heart and mind of the Earth, not its malady.”

Date: March 16, 2006

Time: 7:00 pm

Place: UNBC, Canfor Theatre - Room 6-213

(Refreshments to follow)

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