



# BRANCHING OUT

JUNE 2011

NEWSLETTER OF THE FOREST RESOURCE IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA (FRIAA)



## Growing change

### FRIAA program winds up after supporting numerous forestry initiatives across Alberta.

For many towns in Alberta, forests are a source of beauty and economic growth, but also a threat to the town's well-being (think Slave Lake in May).

That's because forest fires are inevitable. Their inevitability is partially due to nature, but also to people accidentally igniting them. Forests are also vulnerable to diseases and pests, which can threaten a community's economic and environmental health, like the infamous mountain pine beetle.

In 2009, the federal and provincial governments gave FRIAA a total of \$30 million to administer the Fire Hazard Reduction and Forest Health Program (FRHFRP). This short-term program provided funding to a wide range of community projects, all geared at the sustainability and safety of forested areas.

"One objective was to help communities by providing funds for projects that reduce fire hazards or that control the spread of the mountain pine beetle," explains Todd Nash, general manager of FRIAA.

Two and a half years later, the program is coming to a close as the last of the projects are administered and community initiatives wind down across the province.

For the town of Jasper, the \$1 million in FRHFRP funding came at a perfect time. "It allowed us to complete the work we'd been doing for 10 years," explains Alan Westhaver, of Jasper National Park.

With about 25–35 forest fires in the park each year, and most of them clustered around town, Jasper has been vulnerable for quite some time. Most of the FRHFRP projects focused on thinning out the trees to slow the spread of forest fires in the area, creating fuel-free corridors between the town and the forests, and educating residents about how to prevent their homes from igniting in the event that embers from a nearby

forest fire fall on their roofs or yards.

"In order to be truly fire smart in a community, everyone must do their share," explains Westhaver.

At Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park, forest fires have always been a concern, says forest officer Les Weekes. The most vulnerable spot is thought to be the town of Elkwater, which is home to the largest number of residents in the area.

Using the \$650,000 from FRHFRP, the park focused on fuel reduction in the area, creating corridors to block a fire's spread between forest zones and limiting its ability to travel through forest canopy, which is largely out of reach of firefighters. "We're not ever going to eliminate fire in our landscape, but we can minimize it," he says.

For the town of Edson, several FRHFRP projects may have prevented a forest fire from reaching the town last summer, when a child started a fire with a barbecue lighter. One initiative involved thinning out the trees and removing fire-friendly debris in a trail system that runs throughout the town.

"The fire moved less quickly because we'd reduced the fuel loading in one of the areas that did catch fire," explains Pat Golec, woodlands manager with Sundance Forest Industries, which implemented the initiatives.

In addition to bringing numerous benefits to fire safety practices in dozens of Alberta towns, FRHFRP has created tangible benefits for forestry workers.

All told, the program created 2,494 man-months of employment, explains FRIAA program administrator Ashley May. "Employment in the forestry sector seems to have many valleys and peaks," he says. The FRHFRP "created opportunities for workers and contractors who might otherwise have been unemployed."

# Message from the President

Another fiscal year (and winter) has come and gone.

Thanks to everyone involved in delivering projects under FRIAA's various programs. It's people like you who make our programs successful and worthwhile.



Trevor Wakelin

This year we've accomplished a lot in terms of reducing hazards associated with wildfire, insect, and disease. We've also treated much area in Alberta to make our forests more productive and healthy.

The timing of many of our efforts was key this year as numerous forestry workers and communities were able to benefit from the opportunity to work during lean times. FRIAA was also able to show how we work with different funders and organizations towards common forestry objectives.

Over the next year, FRIAA will continue to consider new programs and initiatives. We welcome your ideas.

## Compassion for Slave Lake

It was with heavy hearts that we followed the devastation in Slave Lake in May. The fire made forestry history in the worst way possible when one-third of the town burned, leaving thousands of people homeless.

FRIAA's program objectives include support for communities through forestry enhancement projects and initiatives. Some of our work relates to forest fire protection, so the Slave Lake disaster is a keen reminder of the importance of what we do.

We send our deepest condolences to the people of Slave Lake as they rebuild, and we remain committed to the well-being of communities and forests alike.

Trevor Wakelin  
President, FRIAA Board of Directors



## BRANCHING OUT

**BRANCHING OUT** is the newsletter of the Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta (FRIAA).

**BRANCHING OUT** is published quarterly to communicate the objectives and activities of the association to members and other interested parties.

The purpose of FRIAA is to enhance the timber and non-timber forest resources of Alberta for the benefit of all Albertans. It encourages improved forest management activities over and above those required by government regulation.

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# Come what May

## Program administrator Ashley May never mistakes the forest for the trees.

When Ashley May began working on FRIAA programs in 2009, he was a newcomer to the forestry industry.

But in the course of two years and almost 100 forestry projects, he's come to know the sector intimately, from its major players to the life cycle of the mountain pine beetle.

This learning curve is one of the reasons May loves the work he does, which now includes administering programs for FRIAA. "I'm always exposed to something new. It's like I'm in perpetual learning mode," he says.

But with a bachelor of arts in sociology—the study of human social behaviour—May is just as keen on the social element of the work. "I like interacting with people, and I get that in spades with FRIAA," he says. "The people are the job, so if I didn't like the people, I wouldn't like the job as much as I do now."

Over the last couple of years, May has been responsible for the administration of two forestry programs: the Fire Hazard

Reduction and Forest Health Program (FHRFHP), which began in 2010 and wraps up this year, and the Mountain Pine Beetle Grant Program, which launched in 2007.

Working with both grant programs has given May insight into the challenges of the forestry sector. He's come to understand the devastation the mountain pine beetle has caused to the forests, and the up-and-down nature of the sector. May notes that foresters work with rapidly changing demands and impacts related to weather, fire, insects, economics, and social pressures.

Now that the FHRFHP is wrapping up, May's work with FRIAA will be a much smaller portion of his day-to-day than before. But he's grateful to have had the opportunity. In addition to getting to know the people in the industry, the collaboration



Ashley May

has introduced May to the world of forestry projects and grants. "It's not easy to get that experience," he says. "This is something I think will come in handy in the near or distant future."

## A road less travelled by

### For 33 years, FRIAA board member Jurgen Moll grew a rich career in the forestry industry.

Born and raised on a farm in the Peace River country, Jurgen Moll has always had a deep connection with the land and a strong work ethic. Once he left school to make a life for himself, he held a wide variety of jobs that drew on his background and skills, working as a farmhand, a sawmill and plywood plant worker, and a porter on a West Coast cruise ship that travelled from Vancouver, B.C., to Skagway, Alaska.

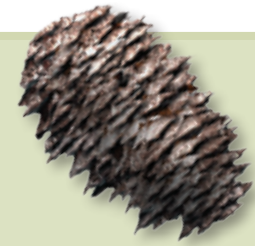
But it wasn't until he took a job on a Grande Prairie initial-attack standby crew in 1960 that he considered forestry as a long-term career choice. It proved to be the first step of a long and rewarding journey.

"It was just a job, to start with," he shrugs. For him, fighting forest fires didn't take bravery, just lots of hard work. "When I started, there was no overtime. We worked seven days a week for a flat rate. We were on call 24 hours a day," says Moll. "Even if you went out in the evening, you had to tell the ranger where you were going."

Some young men stayed for the money; others liked the job itself. But for Moll, it was a stepping stone to a career as a forestry leader in the industry, which began with firefighting and culminated in a leadership position as a forest protection officer in Whitecourt. There, he supervised forest officers and was responsible for managing the fire control program before retiring in 1993.

Moll's career journey included many roles in the Alberta Forest Service, including forest ranger, timber management technician, auditor, chief ranger, and forest protection officer. He was stationed in a number of forestry communities, such as Keg River, Peace River, Edmonton, High Level, Edson, and Whitecourt.

Now that he's retired, Jurgen is honoured to be representing small loggers and sawmillers on FRIAA's Board of Directors. "I like contributing with practical ideas, and I want to make a difference to all people who live and work in Alberta's forested areas."





## Shedding light on watersheds

FORWARD research explores the impacts of forestry on Alberta's watersheds—and what can be done to protect them.

Because of the nature of their product, forestry companies have always been forward-thinking in their practices. Working with a renewable resource means planning harvesting and reforestation practices decades—or even centuries—in advance.

But living systems are complex, and it's been unclear how forestry practices might affect the province's water resources, particularly the watersheds, explains Ray Hilts, chief forester at Millar Western Forest Products Ltd. That's why his company and several others in the province decided to do some research.

"The idea was to initiate a long-term water disturbance project that assessed the impacts of forestry on our water resources in Alberta," says Hilts. "It was intended to be a large-scale,

long-term, empirically sound assessment of our impacts on those streams and water resources we hold so dearly in the province."

So, about 12 years ago, they launched the Forest Watershed and Riparian Disturbance (FORWARD) project with help from FRIAA and several other funding agencies.

"It's a real bricks-and-mortar research project," says Hilts. In various forested areas around the province, eight water-control devices have been positioned on streams and other bodies of water to measure water characteristics like flow rate. Using the data from these devices, researchers have created computer models that can predict how harvesting will affect similar areas elsewhere. In this way, companies can be more strategic

in the forestry practices they use in a given area, creating less of a disturbance to the natural balance.

While watershed research isn't uncommon in the U.S., there are few Canadian projects. FORWARD is one-of-a-kind, says Hilts. As a result, the project has attracted dozens of industry experts, academics, and graduate students, who have contributed to different aspects of the research program.

For Millar Western Forest Products Ltd., data from FORWARD will inform the company's practices, including where it builds crossings and how much vegetation it leaves behind after harvesting. "I think it will add value to how we do what we do, and how we operate in the natural world," says Hilts.