



Branching Out

December 2016 Newsletter

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Branching Out is the newsletter of the Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta (FRIAA). It 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 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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President's Letter

2016 was a challenging year for many Albertans in forestry communities. Our focus, as we close out an eventful year, is on reaffirming our purpose and ensuring that our program delivery continues to be clear and focussed as we support the enhancement of Alberta's forest resources. We also take this opportunity to look back on one of our long-established programs, and explore a couple of programs that are on the horizon for this year and the years ahead. We've recently approved new rounds of FRIP and FireSmart funding, and we are excited for the projects that will be kicking off in the new year.

Wildfire is top of mind for Albertans this year in a way it has never been. More communities from across the province than ever before applied for FireSmart funding. We were proud to approve funding for many projects that will help communities prevent and mitigate the impacts of wildfire. This is a vital process as we collectively adapt to climate change and respond to the increasing frequency and intensity of these fires. It's wonderful to see communities taking such an active role in the health of their forests and in the management of the wildland/urban interface.

Welcome Daniel!

On November 1, 2016, we welcomed Daniel Chicoine to FRIAA's management team. Daniel will take on a broad range of operational duties across all of our programs. Initial assignments include roles as the lead of the WRP (Wildfire Reclamation Program) and the MPBFRP (Mountain Pine Beetle Forest Rehabilitation Program). Daniel has a long history in forestry, with roles ranging from Silviculture Forester at the Alberta Newsprint Company to co-owner and project manager of silviculture at his own consulting company.

"I'm looking forward to working with some new and familiar faces here at FRIAA. My experience managing the Climate Change and Emissions Management Corporation tree adaptation project gave me a chance to develop my forestry project management and fund administration skills. I'm excited to transfer and grow my experience here at FRIAA." – Daniel Chicoine

This year, we also undertook a strategic review that has helped reaffirm and readjust aspects of our operational focus. This process included consideration of the many and varied relationships we have and the different groups we work with. Ultimately, it helped realign operations with our enduring and fundamental responsibility to support the delivery of programs that enhance our forest resource for the benefit of all Albertans. And, as our partners in this, we've taken steps that we hope will simplify the process for funding application and project reporting for you.

As we close out the year, I also want to express, on behalf of the board, our gratitude to you. Our members, partners, the team at MNP and the department responsible for forestry all contribute to the great work we've been able to do, and with your help, 2017 promises to be a very productive year.

Thank you!



Murray Summers,
FRIAA President



Caribou Landscape Restoration Program (CLRP)

Background

The Caribou Landscape Restoration Program was established in 2015 to help fulfill the requirements of the federal recovery strategies for Boreal and Southern Mountain woodland caribou populations, and Alberta's woodland caribou recovery plan.

In May 2015, the Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development established a fund within FRIAA for \$500,000 under the CLRP.

The CLRP's overall objective is to support efforts that sustain and improve caribou habitats in such a way that caribou populations will be healthy and self-sustaining.

Little Smoky / A La Peche Pilot Project

The distribution of woodland caribou in west-central Alberta has greatly declined over the last 50 to 80 years, and the Little Smoky is considered the most disturbed range in Canada, making it a priority area¹.

After some uncertainty around the caribou file, Alberta Environment and Parks, with cooperation from Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, engaged FRIAA to kick-start a pilot project in the Little Smoky/A La Peche range. To begin, the pilot project has two strategic steps:

1. **Create a Restoration Guide**
2. **Develop an operational plan /detailed prescription**

These results of the pilot project will likely be used to start active restoration in the pilot area in winter of 2016/2017.

¹From Alberta Draft Range Plan and Denhoff Report

FRIAA FIRESMART FUNDING AND EOI

The July call for Expressions of Interest received a large number of responses from new applicants. We were encouraged by the number of municipalities, First Nations and Metis groups interested in FRIAA funding as it showed an increased desire for fire hazard reduction throughout the province.

After reviewing the EOI's, we requested 47 applicants provide detailed proposals for further review. The funding cycle culminated with 30 new projects receiving FRIAA FireSmart funding: total funding commitments of \$4,158,206.



The next call for Expressions of Interest for FireSmart funding opened on December 21, 2016 and will close February 23, 2017.

Examples of approved projects – September 2016

1. **Heart Lake First Nation – FireSmart Vegetation Management (\$83,000)** – This project will address wildfire fuel accumulation in areas within and adjacent to the townsite within Heart Lake First Nation. This will reduce the hazard in the area and provide a change in fuel characteristics, which will mitigate extreme wildfire behaviour and ignition potential in the treated areas.
2. **MD of Greenview No. 16 – Joint Emergency Preparedness Table Top Exercise (\$10,100)** – This project will bring together emergency responders and wildfire professionals to conduct a table-top exercise to review the existing/updates to the emergency plans and protocol, in order to be prepared in the event of a wildfire.
3. **Town of Grande Cache – Revegetation of the Grande Cache Fuel Break (\$275,000)** – This project will address the regrowth of wildfire fuels on an existing fire guard and revegetate the area with less flammable plants resulting in a long term maintenance solution for the fuel break.
4. **Municipal District of Bighorn No. 8 – Dead Man’s Flats FireSmart Fuel Reduction (\$168,000)** – This project will conduct vegetation management around the community to reduce the fuel load in the event of a wildfire. Mountain Pine Beetle has continued to be a presence in the area and contributes significantly to wildfire behavior, making this a high priority project for completion.
5. **Driftpile First Nation – FireSmart Education (\$22,000)** – This project is intended to educate the residents on the dangers of wildfire and show how they can mitigate the hazard and risks in the areas surrounding their homes. The recipient will conduct a school programming session targeting the youth in the community, as well as hold an open house with the community and discuss FireSmart principles and the recommendations of the newly completed Wildfire Mitigation Strategy (2016). The project ties into previous projects where the community has used funds to treat areas in which deadfall and understory vegetation have accumulated, posing a wildfire control and ignition risk close to the community.

FRIP FUNDING AND EOI

The Forest Resource Improvement Program published a call for Expressions of Interest in July 2016. The call received 27 responses, and 20 were short listed for further consideration. Those applicants were asked to submit detailed proposals. Nineteen proposals, representing \$3,725,846, were approved for funding.

Examples of approved projects – September 2016

1. **Canadian Forest Products – Partners in Boreal Education (\$240,000)** – This project will deliver a science extension and education program to forest practitioners, citizens and students who live and work in forest communities of northern Alberta.
2. **Sundre Forest Products – The Meadows Trail and Infrastructure Enhancement (\$260,507)** – This project will inventory existing ATV trails in the project area and identify a better trail system to mitigate negative impacts of ATV use in more sensitive areas.
3. **Blue Ridge Lumber – The Effects of Spot Herbicide, Radial Brushing and Aspen Thinning on Spruce Growth and Stand Dynamics (\$34,980)** – This project will re-measure and analyze established data in specific areas of radial brushing experiments and microclimatic measurements, and present the findings.

The next call for Expressions of Interest for FRIP funding opened on December 15, 2016 and will close on March 17, 2017.

SUSTAINED SUCCESS: THE FRIAA WILDFIRE RECLAMATION PROGRAM (WRP)

DESCRIPTION & PURPOSE

Wildfire, though a natural occurrence on the boreal landscape, proves extremely costly and devastating for Alberta's forests. These sites, if left untreated, can take years to return to functioning forests, if at all. The resulting loss of forest has a significant negative impact on Alberta forest resources.

The purpose of the Wildfire Reclamation Program (WRP) is to assist in reclaiming and re-establishing forest cover on cutblocks that were damaged or destroyed by wildfires, in order to improve and enhance forest resources for the benefit of Albertans.

HISTORY

The first WRP grant agreement was established nearly two decades ago in 1998. At that time, in Alberta, wildfire had destroyed over 30,000 hectares of regenerating cutblocks. The provincial government determined that a program was necessary to support its extensive efforts to sustain forest growth in relation to wildfire management.

A \$35million grant was provided to FRIAA to assist in re-establishing forest cover. With the grant, over 40 million seedlings were planted and 100 per cent of the area was returned to productive forest. Total expenditures on the project exceeded \$37.6 million, with additional expenditures covered by investment income.

In 2007, a second WRP grant agreement was initiated. This agreement provides project funding on an annual basis for a ten-year period. As of October 31, 2016, over \$57 million is committed to 51 projects representing 31,782 hectares of cutblocks that were damaged or destroyed by wildfires. All areas will return to healthy, productive forests. Many of these projects are still just beginning, as Alberta regulation requires these sites be monitored and maintained for up to 14 years.

WRP BENEFITS

Forest Sustainability

A critical accomplishment is forest sustainability. The WRP is currently funding the reforestation of 31,782 hectares of burned over cutblocks. If these areas were left untreated, it may take tens of years to restore these sites to functioning forest, if they return to forest at all. The cutblocks may regenerate to grasses and shrubs with no trees present. The WRP speeds up restoration to a forested condition by stabilizing the site and re-establishing forest cover.

Carbon Sequestration

Managed forest stands, like those in the WRP, have been shown to sequester more additional carbon, well over natural stands. Young, rapidly regenerating trees use CO₂ through respiration, removing it from the atmosphere and storing carbon in their biomass as they grow. By reforesting and reclaiming burnt over sites, the WRP is able to increase carbon sequestration in program areas.



Economic Benefits to Rural Albertans

Over the past decade, the WRP has turned \$57 million in forestry and environmental investment into notable economic impacts, including:

- \$111 million in direct and indirect economic output
- \$45 million in total GDP contribution
- \$26 million in total labour income
- 405 full-time equivalent jobs
- \$11 million in estimated tax revenue back to the government

These economic benefits are typically in the tree planting and forestry services sectors, which often employ people living in rural forestry communities. The economic benefits

of different WRP programs are felt for a sustained number of years, as the operation window for reforestation and reclamation is up to 14 years.

In addition to the economic impacts associated with the WRP grant amount, economic benefits are added by sustaining the annual allowable cut (AAC) of forests through the programs approved silviculture activities. By keeping up forest production, ongoing economic benefits are realized in forest products manufacturing:

- \$16 million annually in total economic output
- \$7.1 million annually in total GDP contribution
- \$4.4 million in annual labour income
- 59 full-time jobs year over year

STRATEGIC REVIEW – POLICY CHANGES

In response to feedback from FRIAA members and with a view to continue establishing and administering effective programs, FRIAA recently undertook a strategic review of its operations.

As we set out to carry out the review, we evaluated our programs and processes based on our operating principles and program objectives.

Our operating principles are clear and include:

- Commitment to sound, sustainable forestry practices
- Environmental protection and enhancement
- Service to the public
- Accountability to the Minister, the public, and FRIAA's members
- Value for money spent
- Efficient and effective processes
- Risk management

Our programs and initiatives needed to:

- Enhance the forest resources of Alberta
- Promote the enhanced management of the forest resources of Alberta
- Improve the sustained yield of forest resources of Alberta
- Promote integrated resource management

- Restore public land using reforestation levies collected by FRIAA or cash and securities transferred to FRIAA

In our strategic review, we clarified some foundational points and implemented a number of improvements.

- *Accountability* - FRIAA serves the people of Alberta and is accountable to the Minister responsible for forestry. FRIAA's mandate has been, and continues to be, to enhance Alberta's forest resource for the benefit of Albertans. This review provides renewed focus for our mandate.
- *Program purpose* - FRIAA programs are established for the benefit of the public at large through the enhancement of public forest resources and management across Alberta.
- *Reporting* - prior to the review, the reporting requirements for a standard FRIP agreement were at times cumbersome for the proponents, particularly in regards to OHS reporting. We streamlined the process to make it more efficient, recognizing that all FRIAA proponents and sub-contractors are already required to have a COR (certificate of recognition or equivalent).
- *Auditing* - the auditing process was dependent on third-party audit professionals, engaged by program recipients according to pre-determined schedules. The review determined that FRIAA's needs would be better served by sample-based audit engagements, completed by third-party audit professionals engaged directly by FRIAA.

Please return undeliverable copies to:

FRIAA

Box 11094, Main Post Office

Edmonton, Alberta

T5J 3K4

***For more copies of this issue or to be added to the mailing list,
please contact FRIAA in Edmonton:***

Phone: (780) 429-5873

Fax: (780) 429-4026

Email: admin@friaa.ab.ca

Web: friaa.ab.ca