

BRANCHING OUT

AUGUST 2020



WORKING TOGETHER TO MANAGE OUR VITAL FOREST RESOURCES

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. It is, uniquely, an organization that collaborates with academia, government, municipalities, industry, and the Government of Alberta ministry responsible for forestry. It has supported practical and applied research, on-the-ground forest improvement strategies, and innovative approaches to forest inventory and planning that helps Alberta manage its forest resource sustainably. Editorial material in this newsletter may be reproduced and disseminated with the following credit: "Courtesy of Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta".



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President's Message

In the past few months, everyone has experienced various degrees of impact from the pandemic. Additional to the impact of COVID-19 on FRIAA's work, we recognize that your operations have also been affected. FRIAA is pleased to work with you to accommodate project extensions in consideration of the evolving requirements for health and safety. FRIAA will work with proponents to amend agreements and adjust working and reporting timelines. Please reach out to us to discuss your project specifics.

Usually we are preparing to meet up at FRIAA's annual general meeting at the end of June. But, as with so many traditions these days, we've had to make some adjustments. The AGM has been moved to October 29, 2020. At this time, we're planning to host a live meeting in Edmonton; however, please stay tuned for details and confirmation. We look forward to seeing you when we can.

Following the recently completed fiscal year, FRIAA is pleased to identify that Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP) expenditures achieved a record \$13.7 million in 2019/20, and FRIAA's FireSmart program reached a program high of \$7.2 million. More detailed information is available in our annual report, which will be posted to our website in due course.

In addition to the funding announcements identified in this newsletter, a number of programs are expecting to announce new funding opportunities over the next few months. You can sign up on our web page for program-specific announcements, including those related to new funding.

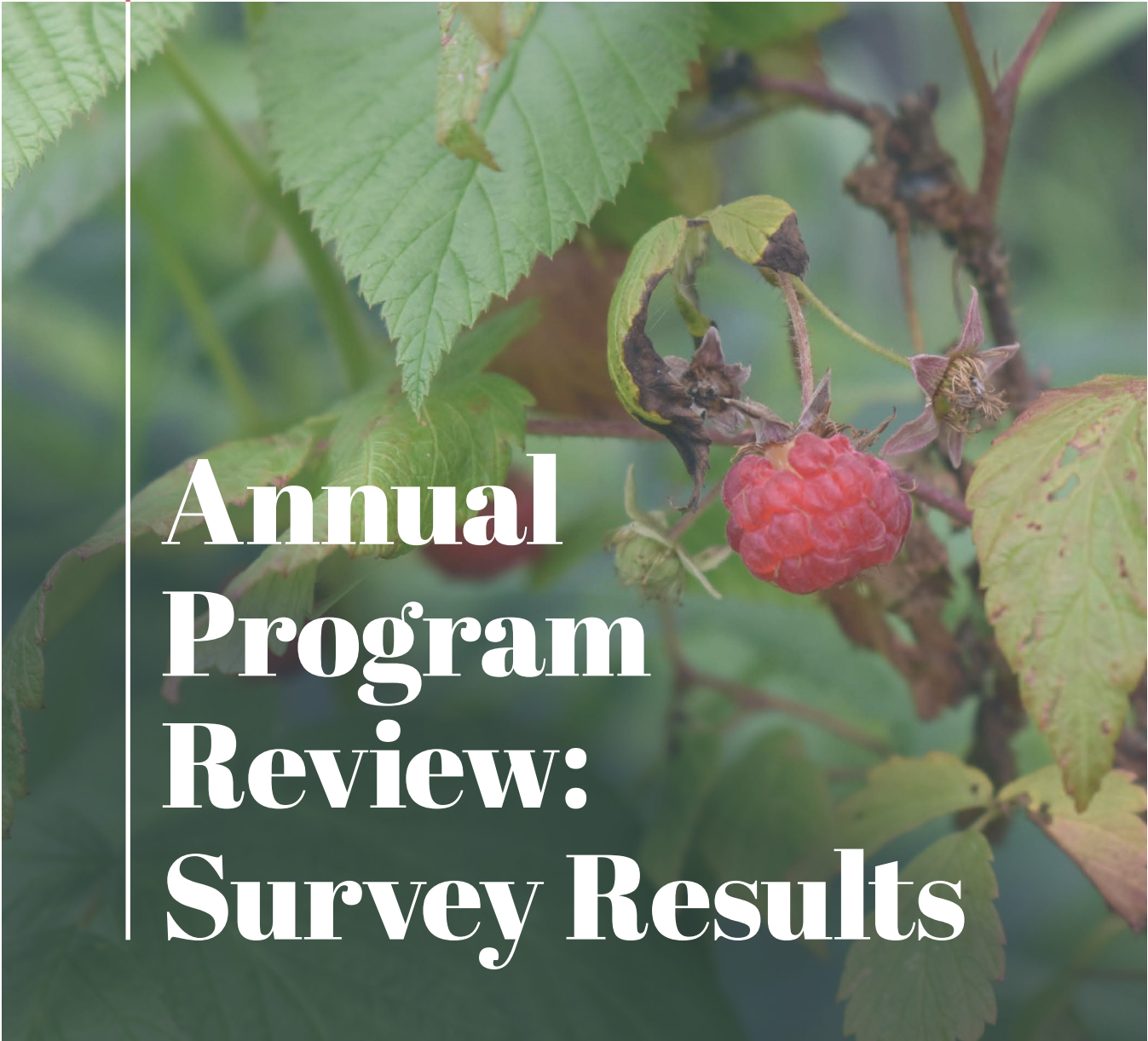
In this edition of *Branching Out* we present the results of our annual program review survey, as well as highlights from our annual operational review summary. Our feature stories highlight FireSmart work being done in the northwest portion of Alberta by the Dene Tha' and exciting advances in wetlands mapping by ANC Timber Ltd. to enhance the forest resource for a multitude of purposes.

Please share your feedback on the newsletter, our programs, and service delivery. We're always happy to hear from our members, service providers, grant recipients, and prospective applicants. We look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you,



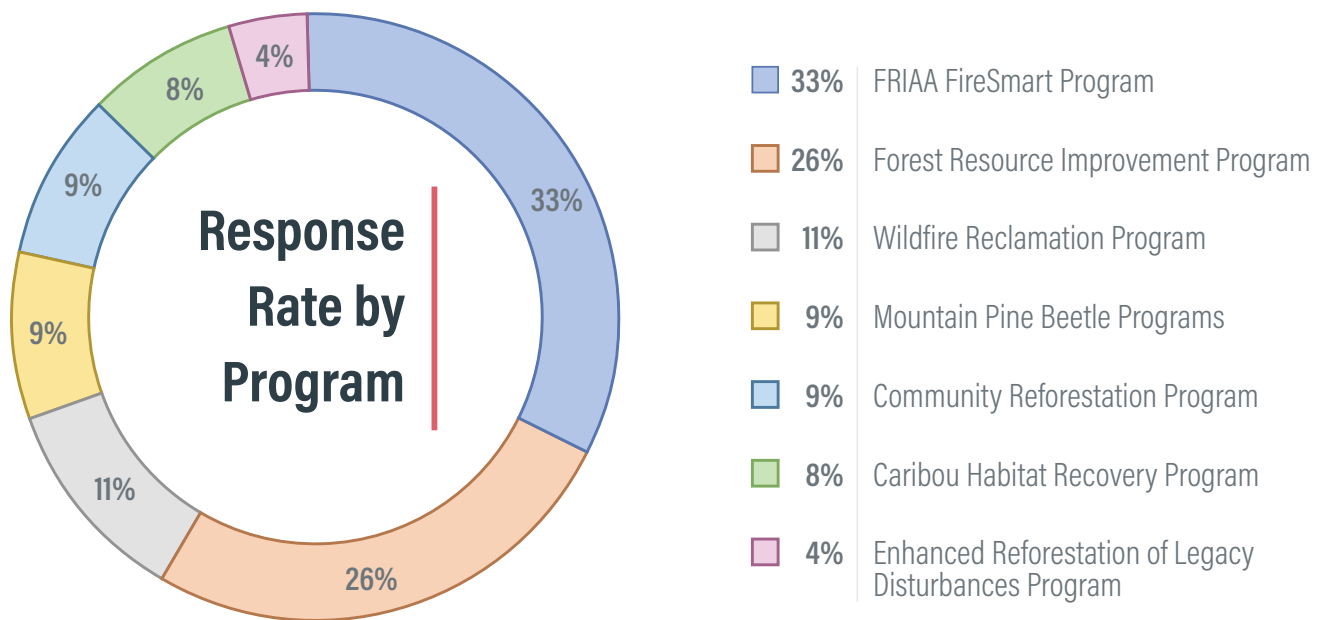
Murray Summers
President, FRIAA



Annual Program Review: Survey Results

■ In April 2020, FRIAA requested feedback on our programs and service delivery in an online survey. The survey link was sent to 350 stakeholders who had engaged with FRIAA programs in recent years. Participants were given the option to remain anonymous; although most provided their name or organizational affiliation, providing valuable context. The response rate increased substantially from 2019, from 77 to 97, reflecting increased engagement in FRIAA and its programs.

The overwhelming majority (94 of 97 respondents) reported being neutral, satisfied, or very satisfied with their involvement in the FRIAA programs. Two respondents reported being unsatisfied with FireSmart, and one was unsatisfied with FRIP. We have reached out to these three and are working with one to address some specific concerns. Our overall response level by program is provided below, indicating that FRIAA FireSmart and FRIP involve the most number of stakeholders.



Most respondents (79%) indicated a preference for email communications, followed closely by those favouring the electronic version of the newsletter (68%). The website received 26% interest, and there was limited interest in Twitter (8%) or the hardcopy newsletter (7%). As a result, FRIAA will transition to producing hard copies of the newsletter only once a year, with distribution to coincide with our AGM.

Over half of respondents (57%) did not know they could subscribe to program-specific email updates on the FRIAA website, a response that was similar to what we heard in the 2019 survey. Funding announcements, new programs, and newsletters are shared via these email distribution lists. In response to this feedback, FRIAA has adjusted the “Information Sign-up” section to be more prominent on our website.

FAQ:

CAN WE SEE APPROVED PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS BY PROGRAM?

- Yes, this information is posted on the program pages of our website.

CAN THERE BE MORE FLEXIBILITY WITH FUNDING AMOUNTS AND DEADLINES?

- Total grant funding is limited to the available funds by program and project; however, we can be flexible with the timing of payments and reporting deadlines.

Please initiate this conversation with your FRIAA contact!

Protecting People and Assets with the FRIAA FireSmart Program





- **Living in a community surrounded by forest has many benefits, and one ever-present threat: wildfire. To mitigate the risk to residents and assets, Dene Tha' First Nation conducted FireSmart vegetation management activities this spring in the community of Chateh, Alberta, and the response was positive.**

Chateh was identified as a high-priority area in a 2016 FireSmart assessment and wildfire mitigation strategy because the forest is very close to residents' houses. With funding from FRIAA, Dene Tha' First Nation hired a local construction and forestry company to thin and prune the forest, remove dead and down material, and pile and burn material from over 18 hectares around the community.

Before starting the project, the Nation conducted a community engagement campaign to ensure people had the correct information about vegetation management and wildfire threat. Initially, team members went door to door, handing out information pamphlets that included a map of the area and an explanation of the FireSmart program. They also hung informative posters around the community.

By building community engagement, the Nation hopes to improve wildfire

prevention decisions within residents' property. The plan is to continually conduct FireSmart activities, and community engagement will help support that. "Wildfire prevention methods, through an integrated approach by external and internal parties, is known as the most successful way to tackle wildfire preparedness throughout the Dene Tha' territory," says Lavonne Ingram, project reporting coordinator, Dene Tha' First Nation.

It can be challenging for First Nations that have communities in forested areas to implement the FireSmart program due to lack of resources, but it's becoming increasingly important. "With global warming, there's going to be extreme variations in temperature, and fire is going to be one of the main catastrophes," explains Fred Didzena, project administrator, Dene Tha' First Nation. "If you're looking toward the future, this is something that needs to be done and maintained from here on."

Program Awards Updates





FireSmart Program Funding Awards

The January 2020 FRIAA FireSmart request for expressions of interest received 27 applications, together asking for \$762,125. In May 2020, the review committee approved 21 projects totalling \$374,345. The approved projects included 6 that focus on FireSmart planning, 3 on public education, and 8 on interagency co-operation and cross-training.

Three example projects are described below. The full list of awards is available at friaa.ab.ca.

■ Fort McKay Métis Nation Inter-Agency

(Fort McKay Métis Nation)

FireSmart discipline: Interagency co-operation

Term: September 2020 – March 2021

Objective: To develop and deliver a one-day tabletop exercise for the community emergency management leadership team and key partners. This exercise will focus on the scenario of a large wildfire threatening the community.

■ Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation Public Education Event

(Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation)

FireSmart discipline: Public education

Term: May 2020 – September 2021

Objective: To host a public education event to educate members of the local community about FireSmart principles and practices and to gain support for ongoing and future FireSmart initiatives on Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation. This event will focus on the role individual community members can play to make their residences and community FireSmart and to educate the community of emergency preparedness in the event of a wildfire.

■ Wildfire Risk Assessment and Mitigation Strategy

(Town of Peace River)

FireSmart discipline: Planning

Term: June 2020 – June 2021

Objective: To develop a wildfire mitigation strategy for the Town of Peace River and a wildfire hazard and risk assessment for the 10-km community zone surrounding the town. This community zone will include the Hamlet of Weberville.

FireSmart Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEOI)

FRIAA is pleased to announce a new RFEOI under the FRIAA FireSmart Program.

The full information and application package are available for download from friaa.ab.ca.

Submissions are due by 4 p.m. on September 14, 2020.

A photograph of a forest landscape. In the foreground, there is a clearing covered with dry, brown leaves and some green weeds. A path leads from the clearing towards a dense forest of tall, thin trees. The sky is overcast with grey clouds. The text "New at FRIAA:" is overlaid in the bottom left corner.

**New at
FRIAA:**

The Community FireGuard Construction Program

■ On April 14, 2020, Minister Dreeshen, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, announced increased FireSmart funding for Alberta in fiscal 2020/21. This additional funding will help mitigate wildfire damages and losses in more Alberta communities by creating FireSmart zones around at-risk communities to reduce wildfire hazards.



The purpose of the program is to support the provincial FireSmart Program initiative by funding the construction of community fireguards that provide for enhanced public safety and improved protection of at-risk communities.

Applications may be submitted by municipalities; Métis Settlements, Co-operatives, Enterprise or Community Locals; and Alberta First Nations. Prioritized projects will include those

directly adjacent to communities, with in-kind contributions by communities viewed favourably. Proposed projects are anticipated to permit livestock grazing as a means of ongoing and longer-term vegetation management on the sites. Substantial completion of the work towards clearing and construction must be completed in this fiscal year.

Program information is available on our webpage at friaa.ab.ca.

Protecting our Wetlands with the Forest Resource Improvement Program



■ **Wetland and water features are critical components of our forests' ecosystems. They contribute to flood mitigation, improve water quality, and support biodiversity.**

For ANC Timber Ltd. (ANC), managing the forest and long-term sustainable yield used to mean just determining what's on the forested land base. Taking it a step further, the company has now delivered a watercourse inventory that can be used for forest management and by anyone who is impacting or enjoying ANC's forest management area.

Data gathering for ANC's Enhanced Watercourse and Wetlands Inventory was carried out with the help of Silvacom Ltd. under the Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP). The goal was to create two enhanced data layers: 1) a water layer identifying detailed linear watercourse features and 2) a wetland classification that will be added to ANC's Alberta Vegetation Inventory.

"ANC worked with Silvacom to determine the process and what kind of data would be required to come up with a finished product that would meet the needs. We used a third party to collect the imagery data and Silvacom did the full interpretation and classification of the wetlands," explains James Norman, forest planner, ANC.



The project involved using light detection and ranging (LiDAR) and red, green, blue, intensity (RGBI) leaf-off imagery as well as wet areas mapping classification to not only identify the presence of wetlands and water features but also identify whether they were fens, marshes, swamps, or shallow open water. "This project put human input into classifying water features, which has a huge impact on forest management," says Norman. "We can now concentrate on areas where we can harvest and reduce the amount of disturbance on our province's wetlands."

Over the last decade, people have become more aware of the importance of monitoring industry's impact on wetlands. Having an inventory allows the forestry company to ensure that they're not impacting them. Making the inventory available to the public via FRIAA helps other companies operating in the area as well as municipalities and the general public to ensure our wetlands stay healthy.





Annual Operational Review Summary

- FRIAA's programs are designed to facilitate and measure completed activities, as defined in agreements with service providers, members, or other grant recipients. Agreements outline project objectives, methodology, activities, deliverables, eligible costs, budgets, safety, and reporting requirements.

Project agreement-holders are expected to maintain management processes that govern the integrity of agreement requirements and deliverables. Operational reviews are used to monitor a subset of projects in more detail and usually on-site.

- **In 2019/20, FRIAA completed operational reviews of 31 projects.**

These reviews included

- 6 members,
- 3 service providers,
- 15 other grant recipients,
- and a broad range of functional activities.

Each of the following programs was subject to review.

- Caribou Habitat Recovery Program (CHRP),
- Community Reforestation Program (CRP),
- Enhanced Reforestation of Legacy Disturbances Program (EnRLD),
- Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP),
- FRIAA FireSmart Program, and
- Mountain Pine Beetle Program (MPBP)

- **28 of 31 projects (90%)**

were satisfactory as reviewed or satisfactory with some additional follow-up completed. As part of an objective for continual improvement, opportunities for improvement are discussed with project managers as applicable.

- **3 projects (10%)**

were unsatisfactory due to unmet proposal or program commitments. Although unintentional on behalf of the proponent, the deficiencies highlighted focus areas for FRIAA management. The projects have since been resolved and closed.



Typical issues that FRIAA encounters include the following, by program:

| Programs | Issues |
|-----------------|--|
| CHRP and FRIP | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Overdue status reports and financial reports. |
| CRP | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Overdue submission of budget and contract addenda. |
| FRIAA FireSmart | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Overdue status reports, financial reports, or final reports.▪ Failure to communicate deviations to FRIAA in a timely manner.▪ Failure to adequately focus vegetation management on areas adjacent to values at risk.▪ Failure to delineate blocks and have prescriptions approved prior to commencing work. |
| MPBP | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Lack of safety documentation / process. |

Operational reviews demonstrate that project deliverables are consistent with project objectives and the terms and conditions of grant agreements. FRIAA's programs result in a very broad range of outcomes, most of which are of high quality. Shortcomings, where identified, are addressed. As has consistently been observed in previous years, operational reviews did not find any cases of major non-compliances associated with inappropriate use of funds or fraudulent reporting.



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