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# BRANCHING OUT

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SEPTEMBER 2021

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## 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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Cover photo: Athabasca River, near  
Athabasca Falls, Jasper, Alberta

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American robin—Edmonton, Alberta

# President's Message



On behalf of the FRIAA board of directors, I hope everyone was able to enjoy the summer. And although hot, dry, and sometimes smoky, there was relatively low fire activity in Alberta this year. That said, community preparedness against the incoming threat of wildfire is key, and it's a feature topic for this edition of *Branching Out*. Read on to learn about two projects in the Community Fireguard Construction Program, in the communities of Loon River First Nation and Wabasca, in the Municipal District of Opportunity. We are also profiling a fuel modification and reduction project carried out by Heart Lake First Nation, in the FRIAA FireSmart Program.

FRIAA held a virtual AGM in June 2021, where the board gave our profound thanks to Murray Summers for his years of service on the board, most recently as president. At the AGM, we were pleased to welcome a new director to the board, Wendy Crosina. Many of you will know Wendy as a long-time professional in the industry. For those who would like to know more, we have introduced her on the next page.

In June, FRIAA conducted our annual survey to ask for your feedback on our programs. We'll share the results with you here. With our fiscal year-end wrapping up in March, FRIAA completed an annual financial audit and prepared the [annual report](#), which you can find on the FRIAA website. We've included a few highlights in this newsletter and welcome you to read more in the full report about exciting accomplishments under the various FRIAA programs.

This summer was busy in our Caribou Habitat Recovery Program. Several projects have been announced, and we are pleased to share the results here. As always, we continue to post the project awards to our website when they become available. The FRIAA FireSmart Program announced multiple awards in June. We have highlighted several projects in the newsletter and have posted the full list [here](#). Another round of FRIAA FireSmart project funding was announced in July. Those project applications should be finalized in December. Please stay tuned to find out more.

Wishing everyone a safe autumn, and I leave you an open invitation to share with us your feedback on the newsletter, projects, and programs. We love to hear from you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. Briand".

**Richard Briand**  
First Vice-President, FRIAA



## Welcome to New Board Member

In June 2021, FRIAA's board of directors welcomed **Wendy Crosina**. As director of forest sustainability for Weyerhaeuser Canada Timberlands, as well as a registered professional forester and registered professional biologist, Wendy manages wildlife and ecology issues for all Weyerhaeuser operations across Canada. She is interested in ensuring ecological values continue to be integrated into forest management practices and works hard to find the right balance between economics and the environment.

"The people in the forestry sector are wonderful and very genuine about their desire to see forests successfully grow and thrive on the landscape. Working with folks who are this passionate about sustainability is certainly a draw to working with them. It's always a good day when I can spend time in the forest with any of our folks," says Wendy.

"As a member company, Weyerhaeuser is very interested in helping with the governance of the association and I expect to contribute by engaging at the board level."

On the importance of joining the board, Wendy explains, "I would like to ensure that the Alberta forest sector continues to support projects that generate good science and data, for the benefit of all Albertans. For example, the Forest Resource Improvement Program plays an important role in ensuring that our forests remain viable through innovative and sound forestry practices."

Wendy obtained two bachelor of science degrees from the University of Alberta—one in forestry and one in wildlife management. She then completed her master's degree in forestry. She began working with Weyerhaeuser in 1999.





# Featured Projects

Purple-stemmed aster,  
near Slave  
Lake, Alberta

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# CFCP: Reducing the Risk of Wildfire Threat

## Loon River First Nation

Living in forested areas offers opportunities for recreation, hunting, and fishing as well as access to materials used for medicine and ceremony. But the threat of wildfire is a major risk. To protect its residents, Loon River First Nation took on a project to construct three fireguards over 39.9 hectares on the southern portion of its property in northern Alberta.

"In the past, nearby communities came close to burning as a result of wildfire," says Eric Shaw, field supervisor, Loon River First Nation. "We have quite a few houses on that side of the community, so a fireguard gives us peace

of mind. And it was good to keep people employed throughout COVID."

Eleven local people were employed to salvage merchantable timber and to rake, pile, and burn leftover debris. The goal was to have the 100-metre-wide fireguards work with existing wildfire mitigation vegetation management treatment units and an existing cutblock, providing the community with permanent, large-scale protection against wildfire.

Loon River First Nation received a grant through FRIAA's **Community Fireguard Construction Program** (CFCP) for this important project. The work took place between December 2020 and March 2021 and was completed ahead of schedule. Some of the merchantable timber is being sold while harvested spruce was either shared with elders in the community for firewood or milled into lumber at the local sawmill.

The new fireguard will also enable the Nation to raise more cattle. Plans are in place to stump, seed, and fence the area and create watering holes that can be used for livestock or firefighting.

"Turning it into grazing land will benefit our community by giving more individuals the opportunity to make hay and access pasture land," says Shaw. "We're also looking forward to creating a fireguard on the north side of the community so that it's protected on all sides."



Fireguard at Loon River First Nation





# CFCP: Protecting and Benefiting from the Land

## Wabasca, in the MD of Opportunity

Fireguard at  
Wabasca

In northeastern Alberta lies the hamlet of Wabasca, located in the Municipal District (MD) of Opportunity. Surrounded by forest, the community of Wabasca has been threatened by wildfire in the past, leading to at least two evacuations of the community, and a fireguard was needed to provide additional protection.

In 2016, an initial fireguard was created on the north side of the hamlet, but more work had to be done. Through the second half of 2020 and even now, a 500-metre wide and 12-kilometre-long fireguard is being created using funding from FRIAA and from the sale of merchantable timber and in-kind contributions from the MD of Opportunity. Clearing occurred under frozen ground conditions to minimize the impact on soil. To protect water quality in the region, riparian areas and lower-fire-risk wetlands were not cleared.

The MD will use the fireguard as grazing land for local residents who have a few head of cattle or several horses. "Hay fields are limited in this area,

so this opportunity created the ability to support local people and have a vegetation maintenance plan on the fireguard. Of course, there is also increased assurance of the ongoing safety precaution of having a fuel break to protect the community," explains Bill Auger, Director of Regulatory Services, Planning & Emergency Management. "People see that the MD is looking after the community to keep it safe."

There were a few challenges during the project, particularly around COVID restrictions and limitations, which sometimes made communications, staffing, and sourcing parts for the necessary heavy equipment difficult. However, Bill is quick to address the upside: "Overall, I think this was a good project to boost the local economy by tapping into employment with local contractors and the spin-off services that created. The timing couldn't have been better. With the energy sector on a bit of a halt, we had iron sitting that might otherwise have left the community. The project bought time to keep employees hired and to regroup."





# **FRIAA FireSmart: Protecting an At-Risk Community**

## **Heart Lake First Nation**

Thin, prune,  
and mulch  
fuel-  
modification  
treatment at  
Heart Lake  
First Nation

FRIAA awarded funding under the FireSmart Program to Heart Lake First Nation in 2018. Heart Lake is located 70 kilometres northeast of Lac La Biche and 12 kilometres off Highway 881. The community is on 4,496 hectares, of which 99% are forested, with one road in and out.

The funding and project focused on vegetation management to protect Heart Lake First Nation from the devastation of a wildfire.

"At the time of the Fort McMurray fires, there was a fire at the entrance road to Heart Lake," says Tony Bagga, director of Government and Industry Relations. "The community was evacuated immediately. Education and the evaluation of our situation and our vulnerability were addressed immediately."

Heart Lake had developed a wildfire mitigation strategy in 2016 and worked with FRIAA to complete the program from December 2018 to December 2019.

Nearly 17 hectares were identified as high risk. More than 20 members worked to reduce the risk of a fire with fuel breaks, vegetation removal, thinning, and pruning. The community members also benefited by gathering the timber for cultural ceremonies.

"Chief and Council supported this opportunity to capitalize on the funding with community engagement to protect the Nation members," says Bagga. "The collaboration of leadership, Heart Lake members, and staff—with the support of FRIAA FireSmart funding—was a huge win to protecting our people."



Tony Bagga



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# FRIAA Annual Program Survey Results

In June 2021, stakeholders who had engaged with FRIAA's programs in recent years were invited to participate in our annual program review. A total of 313 stakeholders received the emailed survey and 69 responded (a total response rate of 22%). While about 70% of respondents provided either a name or organizational affiliation, they could choose to remain anonymous. Respondents could also identify with multiple programs, so 69 respondents provided 99 responses—indicating that several stakeholders are engaging in more than one of FRIAA's programs.

The Community FireGuard Construction Program continues to support ongoing projects through to March 31, 2022; however, no additional funding will be provided to this program. The one-time FRIAA Forest-Sector COVID Safety Measures Program will also not receive new grant funding. As a result, neither program was surveyed for participation.

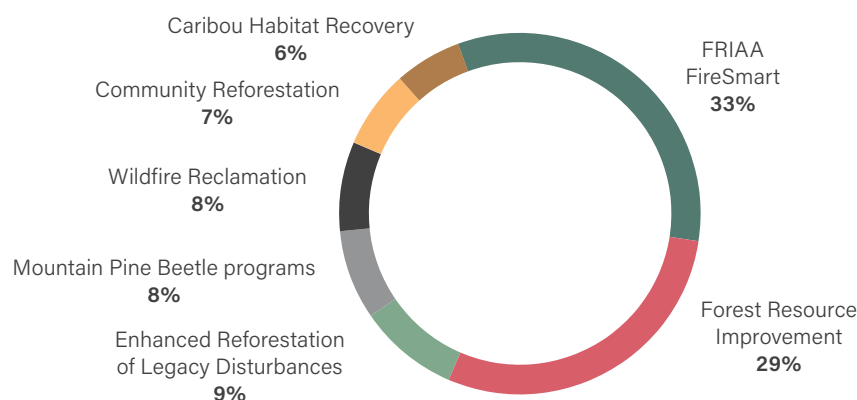
Involvement with FRIAA's programs was met with overwhelming satisfaction from most respondents: 66 of 69 described themselves as

neutral, satisfied, or very satisfied. One respondent was not satisfied with the FRIAA FireSmart Program, while two were very unsatisfied with WRP and FRIP, respectively. FRIAA has followed up to address specific concerns. Survey results indicate that the highest stakeholder engagement was within the FRIAA FireSmart and FRIP programs for 2020–21.

Most respondents (58%) are aware of the new submissions portal and are satisfied with how easy it is to access through the FRIAA website. Feedback about submission status and project timeline communications has been addressed. As FRIAA undergoes a current technological review, a new system may further facilitate this process in the future.

To submit proposals, amendments, progress and final reports, payment requests, deliverables, and other documents for all programs, use our web-based submission portal, which can be accessed from the FRIAA website at <https://friaa.ab.ca/program-submissions/>

## Response Rate by Program





A scenic landscape photograph showing a dense forest of evergreen trees in the foreground, with rolling hills and a range of rugged mountains in the background. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is bright and clear.

# Program Awards

Community  
Reforestation  
Program, near  
Hinton, Alberta



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# FRIAA FireSmart

The January 2021 FRIAA FireSmart request for expressions of interest received 36 applications, together asking for \$2,680,296. In June 2021, the review committee approved 24 proposals totalling \$1,477,779.

See the full list of [project awards](#). Here are examples of approved projects:

## **Wildfire Preparedness Planning**

*(Town of Peace River)*

**Discipline:** FireSmart planning

**Term:** May 2021 – February 2022

**Objective:** To develop a wildfire preparedness guide for the Town of Peace River and two sprinkler deployment plans for the communities of Riverview and Cool Springs.

## **Community Education on Vegetation Management**

*(Siksika Nation)*

**Discipline:** Public education

**Term:** May 2021 – September 2021

**Objective:** To enhance Siksika Nation's knowledge of FRIAA FireSmart principles through public education. Local youth will promote this initiative by reducing fuels around homes and abandoned houses, as well as multi-use areas. The delivery of public education to the community also includes long-term mitigation actions, risk reduction for homes, and connecting with community elders and residents.

## **Vegetation Management 2021–2022**

*(Gift Lake Métis Settlement)*

**Discipline:** Vegetation/fuel management

**Term:** July 2021 – April 2022

**Objective:** To reduce the threat of incoming wildfire to Gift Lake Métis Settlement. The community will treat 14.9 hectares by removing dead and downed vegetation and thinning and pruning. The project area identified as high risk is located immediately behind residential houses and consists of undeveloped forest.



Yellowhead County FRIAA FireSmart  
fuel modification at Robb, Alberta

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**FRIAA FireSmart's June 30th request for expressions of interest** closed on September 13, 2021. Project applicants will be short-listed and invited to submit detailed proposals in late October. Successful applicants will be notified by late December, and projects will start in January 2022.

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# Caribou Habitat Recovery Program (CHRP)

## Recently Approved Projects

In December 2020, FRIAA published a request for expressions of interest and subsequent invitation for request for proposals (RFP) for “implementation of **Caribou Habitat Restoration** in the **Little Smoky** caribou range for compartment LSM6.”

- FRIAA received 8 expressions of interest.
- In April 2021, the project was awarded to **Eric Auger & Sons Contracting Ltd.**

In April 2021, FRIAA published an RFP for “**Seed Collection** in the **Red Earth** caribou range.”

- FRIAA received 4 proposals.
- In June 2021, the project was awarded to **Tree Time Services Inc.**

In July 2021, FRIAA published an RFP for “**Vegetation Inventory** in the **Caribou Mountains, Richardson, and Yates** caribou ranges.”

- FRIAA received 5 proposals.
- In August 2021, the projects were awarded to **Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute** (Richardson), **Greenlink Forestry Inc.** (Yates), and **Silvacom Ltd.** (Caribou Mountains).



Woodland  
caribou

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# Did You Know?

## Highlights from FRIAA's 2020–21 annual report

- FRIP had provided about \$25.9 million in funding and continued to support commitments of \$33.4 million across 175 ongoing projects.

- FRIAA FireSmart works to ensure the safety of Alberta's people, communities, and forests against wildfire threats. FRIAA is committed to prioritizing the needs of local at-risk communities and has approved 369 community engagement plans, with 80 active projects.

- The CRRP works alongside Alberta Environment and Parks to support provincial and federal strategies of reducing the disturbance in caribou habitat. In 2020–21, FRIAA funded nearly \$1.5 million in projects, and supported another \$6.4 million in outstanding commitments.

- In an effort to ensure the reforestation of legacy disturbed sites, nearly 195,895 seedlings were planted across 164 hectares in 2020–21.

- FRIAA is focused on the future of carbon sequestration through Alberta's public lands and has committed \$9 million to the reforestation of burned or otherwise naturally disturbed areas early 2020.

- The MPBP demonstrates that both the Province and industry partners are focused on containing and minimizing the spread of mountain pine beetles across Alberta. To protect Alberta's forests, over \$35 million has been provided for activities for pine beetle control since the program's inception in 2007.

- The CRP supports small timber operators and permit holders to manage harvested cutblocks and has helped to reforest 33,400 hectares since May 1, 2000.

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To learn more about the important work being accomplished with FRIAA funding, check out [FRIAA's 2020–21 annual report](#).

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FRIAA  
BOX 11094, MAIN POST OFFICE  
EDMONTON, ALBERTA  
T5J 3K4

**TO BE ADDED TO THE EMAIL LIST,  
PLEASE CONTACT FRIAA AT:**

PHONE: 780-429-5873

FAX: 780-429-4026

EMAIL: [admin@friaa.ab.ca](mailto:admin@friaa.ab.ca)

WEB: [friaa.ab.ca](http://friaa.ab.ca)

