
BRANCHING OUT

MAY 2022



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

Cover photo: Bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*), near Janvier, Alberta

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Labrador tea (*Ledum groenlandicum*), near Janvier, Alberta

President's Message



Greetings on behalf of FRIAA's board of directors. Spring is a time of renewal, and the board is pleased to welcome a new director, Daniel Lux, assistant deputy minister (ADM) of Forestry at the ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development. Welcome Dan! The board also extends a sincere thank-you to Bruce Mayer, the previous ADM at Alberta Agriculture and Forestry. Bruce's contributions to the FRIAA board provided valuable insight and guidance.

In this edition of *Branching Out*, we are pleased to share a diversity of project stories, including the installation of bluebird nesting boxes to promote biodiversity, provision of bear-proof food lockers to reduce negative consequences of bear and human interactions, a multi-pronged approach to mountain pine beetle control, and the ongoing successes of the Outland Youth Employment Program throughout the pandemic.

Several FRIAA programs have received project grants over the past few months, including FRIAA FireSmart, the Caribou Habitat Recovery Program, and the Mountain Pine Beetle Program. Some of the projects are outlined here, with additional details available on our website at www.FRIAA.ab.ca.

I'm pleased to announce that FRIAA's annual general meeting is scheduled to be in person this year after two years online! It will be held in Edmonton on June 23rd, 2022. We are looking forward to seeing you again.

The board welcomes your feedback and invites you to connect with us via admin@friaa.ab.ca. We look forward to hearing from you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "R. Briand". The signature is stylized with a large, looped "B" and a trailing flourish.

Richard Briand
President, FRIAA



Welcome to Our New Board Member

Dan Lux, New FRIAA Director

FRIAA is very pleased to welcome Dan Lux to our board of directors. Dan became assistant deputy minister of forestry with the Government of Alberta in February 2022. He brings a strong background of experience and education to the board after working in the forestry sector since obtaining his master's degree from Simon Fraser University in 1995.

After starting his career as a consultant in the interior of British Columbia, Dan moved back home to Alberta, joining the Alberta government in 1999 as a forest health officer in Rocky Mountain House. Dan relocated to Edmonton when he became senior manager of forest health for the Province in 2005; here he oversaw the development and delivery of the emerging mountain pine beetle program. In addition to his forest health role, Dan was seconded to lead the provincial caribou recovery planning process in the fall of 2013. In 2014, Dan became executive director of the Forest Industry Development Branch and expanded his role to oversee the Forest Management Branch in 2019.

On joining FRIAA, Dan said, "I am excited to join the FRIAA board to contribute to a very successful organization that has a long track record of managing programs that benefit Alberta's forests. There is so much potential for FRIAA to facilitate programs that will position us well into the future by reducing the impact of climate change, advancing reconciliation, and ensuring our forests are among the best managed in the world."

A photograph of a forest floor. In the foreground, a large, weathered log lies horizontally, covered in a thick layer of green moss and fallen brown leaves. The log's bark is dark and peeling. The background is a dense forest of tall, thin trees with green foliage, creating a soft, dappled light effect on the forest floor.

Project Stories

Forest renewal begins
on the forest floor in
a mixedwood stand,
Wabasca, Alberta



Bluebird Nest-Box Installation

A Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP) Project by McLean Forest Products Ltd.



Alberta hosts approximately 439 species of birds, with a vast diversity of lifestyles and mating and migration patterns. However, there has been a recent decline in the bird population over the last five years within the province, which has led to an increase in pests. To combat this, McLean Forest Products Ltd. designed a project to provide approximately 170 new bird-boxes in the Caroline, Alberta, area in the summer of 2021.

“Since the area we work in is mostly lodgepole pine forest, we are concerned about the potential pine beetle threat. We hope that, by building and distributing these bird houses, a large, stable population of birds will be encouraged to live in this area,” says Robert McLean of McLean Forest Products Ltd. “The people doing the work were very willing and resourceful and worked hard to make it successful.”

The main goal is to increase the bird species biodiversity and potentially reduce forest

pests by targeting a nesting box tailored to the mountain bluebird. This small, bright-blue member of the thrush family is native to Alberta. The low population numbers of this species could be due to their preference for cavity nesting sites, which means competing with non-native house sparrows and European starlings. You can watch these beautiful birds travel at a leisurely pace while hunting for beetles. McLean Forest Products Ltd. received funding through FRIAA’s Forest Resource Improvement Program, and the construction and placement of the bird nest-boxes took place between June 1, 2021, and September 22, 2021.

“We have had several very positive reactions to seeing the bird houses, and we really look forward to seeing how many of them will be inhabited this summer. We would be interested in making this an ongoing project—building and distributing more bird houses as well as observing, cleaning, and maintaining the bird houses each fall.”

OYEP Thriving During the Pandemic

A Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP) Project

The Outland Youth Employment Program (OYEP) is a local six-week community-driven initiative that works towards equity and opportunity for Indigenous youth in Alberta. They work through land-based education, training, and work opportunities. During those six weeks, youth are fully consumed in natural-resource-based work culture, including safety training, time management, remote and rotational work schedules, and work-life balance. In 2021, participants came from Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, Bigstone Cree Nation, Fort McMurray #468, Heart Lake First Nation, Lubicon Lake, Peerless Lake, Samson Cree Nation, Slave Lake, Whitefish Lake First Nation, and Woodland Cree First Nation.

In the summer of 2021, OYEP was able to transition back to a full six-week program while still observing COVID-19 restrictions. "Last year was incredible: coming out of COVID, and the difficult year Indigenous peoples were going through with past traumas being talked about in the news," says Brittany McCoy, OYEP's western manager. During that time last summer, youth were able to get back to planting trees and touring a mill," she explains. Program participants earned several certifications, including for performing first aid and operating a chainsaw, as well as high-school credits. 2021 also marked the inaugural year for the TransCanada Trail and OYEP partnership. As part of the partnership, youth helped clear and build trail at the Mihkowapikwaniy Cultural Camp.





Bear-Proof Food Lockers in Clearwater County

A Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP) Project by West Fraser

Instead of camping at public and private sites for a nightly fee across the province, Albertans can pitch their tent or park an RV on public or “Crown” land. Ever since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an increase of “Crown-

land camping” on empty public land. The need for infrastructure to support the growing popularity is needed more than ever. A Crown-land camping Facebook group (“Crown Land Camping Alberta”) created in March of 2020 has

already ballooned to over 110,000 members as of May 2022.

Much of the interest in the Facebook group is for areas within Clearwater County in western Alberta. A vast majority of the users in that area are new to Crown-land camping. Many are not aware of the correct way to store food and garbage. The most popular spots to camp in Clearwater County are next to lakes and rivers (riparian areas). However, those areas are also popular spots for both grizzly and black bears. Foothills Research Institute recently released their "Clearwater Grizzly Bear Population Inventory," which indicates a doubling of the bear population since 2005.

With the increase of both Crown-land campers and bears, it is important to adapt. This project installed 26 bear-proof food storage lockers at both vehicle access points and Crown-

land camping areas. The hope is that it will curtail human-and-bear conflicts and reduce the number of euthanized bears from those interactions. "Bears will figure out pretty quick they can't get into those lockers. Unfortunately, when bears and humans interact, bears lose their lives," Tom Daniels of West Fraser says.

During the last couple weeks of October 2021, the lockers were ordered and assembled, including concrete bases, so they could be slung into the site by helicopter.





This project used fall-and-burn, fall-and-chip (pictured here), and fall-and-peel techniques.

A Multi-Pronged Approach to Beetle Control

A Mountain Pine Beetle Program (MPBP) Project by West Fraser

Alberta is home to part of the world's largest boreal forest, which covers 48% of the provincial land. Known to be one of the deadliest pests to this forest, mountain pine beetles (MPB) attack the healthy trees by burrowing into the conductive tissue and laying larvae. If left unmanaged, they could devastate the coniferous forests in Alberta and spread across the boreal region. Hinton Wood Products created a unique program to prevent the spread of these pests in Alberta's forest regions.

"The project follows provincial standards for level 1 control and works with the highest priority sites. They also work in coordination of overall objectives of MPB control," says Planning Superintendent Hal Jackson, speaking to the alignment of their project and provincial priorities.

Specific to the Edson Forest Area, this program takes a different approach than previous programs and aims to be more cost-effective by using fall-and-burn and fall-and-chip control techniques during winter conditions, as well as fall-and-peel procedures once burning is no longer feasible. Hinton Wood Products received funding through FRIAA, and the Level 1 Control MPB Ground Survey took place between February 1, 2021, and October 12, 2021. They successfully controlled green-attack trees that would not have been saved if the project had not occurred.

"It was good to see us as a company working with FRIAA to use any resources available to minimize overall beetle populations. There wasn't a high number of beetles in the area the following year; it was quite effective in reducing beetle numbers over one year."



Program Funding Awards

FRIAA FireSmart mulching
vegetation management project
by the MD of Opportunity No. 17
at Red Earth Creek, Alberta

FRIAA FireSmart

The June 2021 FRIAA FireSmart request for expressions of interest received 35 applications, together asking for \$3,388,350. In December 2021, the review committee approved 23 proposals totalling \$2,051,602.

See the full list of approved projects at <https://friaa.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Summary-of-Approved-FireSmart-Projects-December-2021.pdf>.

Below are just a few examples:

■ Wildfire Co-Planning Communities

(University of Alberta)

Discipline: FireSmart planning

Term: April 2022 to December 2023

Objective: Develop five long-term staging areas to evaluate new methods for wildfire risk assessment and enable communities to approach wildfire planning collaboratively. This will allow enhanced understanding of communities' current state/gaps using available data sources. Project outcomes will guide future best practices for implementation on a larger scale.

■ Fort McKay Métis Public Education

(Fort McKay Métis Community Association)

Discipline: Public education

Term: February 2022 to June 2022

Objective: Collaborate with Lesser Slave Forest Education Society to develop a FireSmart education session for Fort McKay Métis Community Association. This will enhance public awareness of FireSmart in the community.



FRIAA FireSmart, thin and prune vegetation management, Peavine Metis Settlement, Alberta

■ Wildland/Urban Interface Field Exercise

(Town of Canmore)

Discipline: Inter-agency co-operation

Term: January 2022 to October 2022

Objective: Offer a wildland/urban interface field exercise to identify strengths and weaknesses in existing emergency plans and improve future response to a wildland/urban interface fire. Participants will include the Town of Canmore, Kananaskis Improvement District, Calgary Forest Area, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Alberta Emergency Management Agency, Alberta Parks, MD of Bighorn, the Town of Banff, and Banff National Park.

FRIAA FireSmart's most recent request for expressions of interest closed on February 18, 2022. Project applicants were invited to submit detailed proposals by May 2nd. Award recipients will be notified in early June, followed by project kick-offs.



FRIAA FireSmart's thin, prune and remove dead and down vegetation management project by the MD of Opportunity No. 17 at Sandy Lake, Alberta

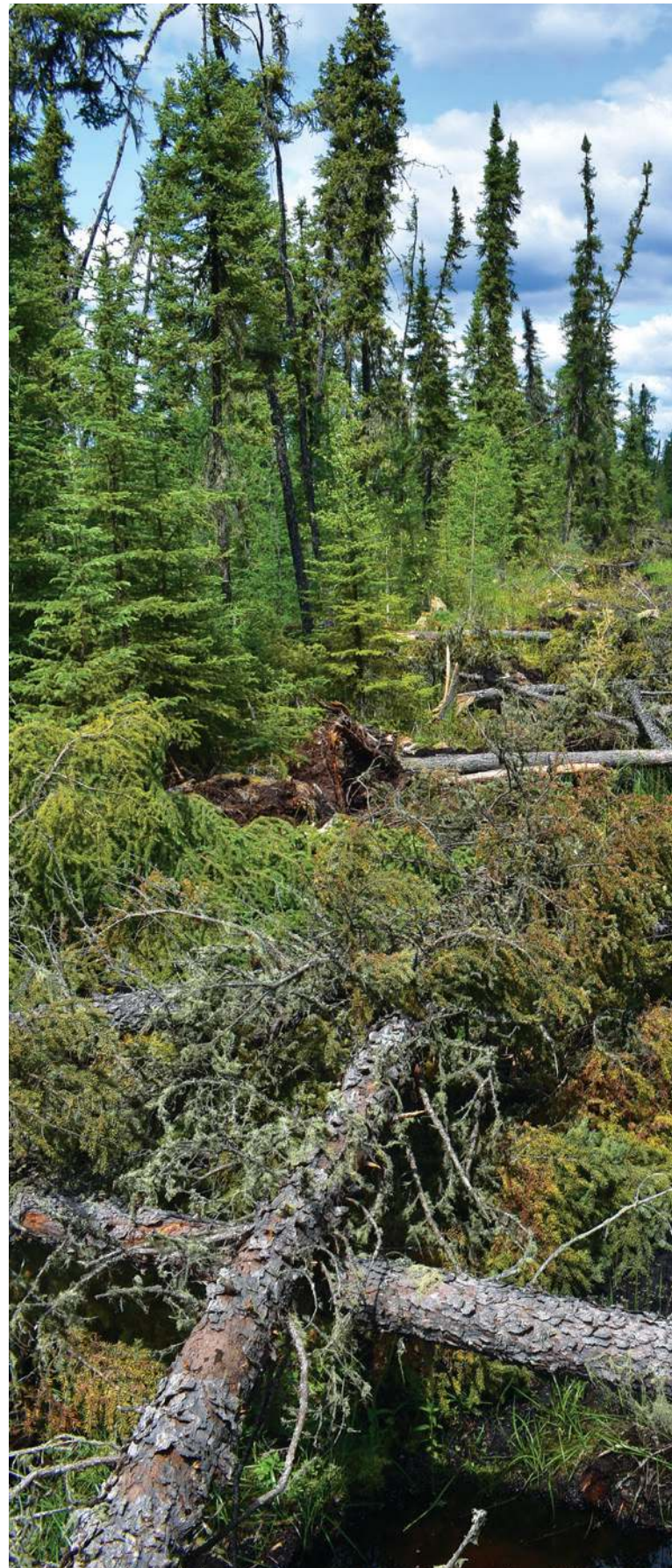
Caribou Habitat Recovery Program (CHRP)

In May 2021, FRIAA published a request for expression of interest and subsequent invitation for request for proposals (RFP) for “implementation of **caribou habitat restoration** in the **Little Smoky** Caribou range for compartment LSM1, LSM3, and LSM7.” FRIAA received five expressions of interest. In October 2021, projects were awarded to **Eric Auger & Sons Contracting Ltd.** for LSM7 and **Westcore Contracting Inc.** for LSM1 and LSM3.

In May 2021, FRIAA published a request for expression of interest and subsequent invitation for RFPs for “**Operational planning** for caribou habitat restoration in the **Little Smoky** and **A La Pêche** caribou ranges for compartment ALP2, LSM9, LSM10-12, and LSM13-14.” FRIAA received six expressions of interest. In October 2021, projects were awarded to **Forcorp Solutions Inc.** for ALP2 and LSM9, **Golder Associates Ltd.** for LSM13-14, and **Silvacom Ltd.** for LSM10-12.

In June 2021, FRIAA published a request for expression of interest and subsequent invitation for RFPs for “**Operational planning** for caribou habitat restoration in the **Cold Lake / ESAR** Caribou range for for two compartments, Clyde and Christina.” FRIAA received six expressions of interest. In October 2021, the project was awarded to **Golder Associates Ltd.** for both compartments.

Woodlands North Inc.,
seismic line deactivation,
Cold Lake caribou range





Mountain Pine Beetle Program (MPBP)

In October 2021, FRIAA published an RFP for level 1 MPB control activities. FRIAA received two proposals, which were approved in December. Projects were awarded to **Blue Ridge Lumber Inc.** for work on I.R. #134 with Alexander First Nation and **Sundre Forest Products Ltd.** for work on the O'Chiese First Nation Reserve and Sunchild First Nation Reserve.

In February 2022, FRIAA published an RFP for MPB control activities. FRIAA received nine proposals, which were approved in April. Approved projects include four for protection of genetic trials, orchards, and research plots; four for log-yard management; and one for long-distance dispersal monitoring. Projects were awarded to **Blue Ridge Lumber Inc., Canadian Forest Products Ltd., Foothills Forest Products Inc., Hinton Wood Products – a Division of West Fraser Mills Ltd., and Sundre Forest Products Inc.**

See the full list of project awards at <https://friaa.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/MPBP-February-2021-RFP-Awarded-Projects-Summary.pdf>.



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