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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: Kakwa Falls in west-central Alberta

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Peering into Alberta's boreal mixedwood forest in the eastcentral region, southwest of Conklin, Alberta

## **President's Message**



Greetings, everyone! As the days get shorter and cooler and we reset to the fall schedule, it is opportune to take a moment to reflect back and look forward.

On June 23rd, 2022, FRIAA held our first in-person annual general meeting in Edmonton since 2019. With over 60 members and guests in attendance, we held the formalities of the meeting and enjoyed great conversations during the dinner reception. Members received a hard copy of FRIAA's annual report, which we can mail to you upon request. You can also download it online. Read more about the past year's outcomes in this newsletter. We also share the results of our annual program survey.

The program stories we compiled for you cover the Mountain Pine Beetle Program (MPBP), Caribou Habitat Recovery Program (CHRP), FRIAA FireSmart program (FFP), and Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP). Over the past few months, several project awards were granted in the CHRP and FFP, which we are pleased to share in this newsletter. Looking forward, the Enhanced Reforestation of Legacy Disturbances (EnRLD) program has opened a request for proposals; details can be found on the FRIAA website through a link provided in the following pages.

We encourage members to continue submitting FRIP project proposals. For ongoing projects, we continue to support all proponents in your project delivery and achievement of outcomes. As always, please feel free to connect with us at any time. We appreciate hearing from you and always value your input about our program delivery.

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**Richard Briand** President, FRIAA

# Project Stories

Abundant, vibrant, and tasty fall blueberries (Vaccinium myttilloides) in the Little Smoky caribou range, westcentral Alberta.

## The Effectiveness of Mountain Pine Beetle Population Control

The decline in mountain pine beetle (MPB) populations has many in the forest industry cautiously optimistic. The flight of MPB from B.C. reached its peak back in 2006 and was a major concern for the province at the time as populations quickly spread across the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains and further into Alberta's forested landscape. MPB attack mature pine trees, which can mean devastating long-term impacts on the forest industry and local communities if populations are not effectively controlled.

The decline of the beetle population has not gone unnoticed by many **MPB program** (**MPBP**) grant funding recipients, as several have reported noticing fewer beetles being caught in control traps each year. Alberta's provincial strategy and FRIAA's program were significant contributors in the decline of MPB on the landscape. Log-yard management is an eligible control activity that the MPBP supports. The projects involve utilizing Lindgren funnel traps and terpinolene (i.e., pheromone) lures to attract MPB to the traps and away from the harvested timber. Despite seeing lower populations, Blue Ridge Lumber's Planning Supervisor, Dane Webster, has noted the continued importance of these control programs as MPB populations could see an upswing resulting from climate change

MPB larvae can be killed when the bark temperatures reach below -37.5 degrees for several consecutive days; but as winters become milder, temperatures may no longer drop low enough for long enough to effectively kill the overwintering larvae. While MPB populations appear to remain endemic for now, increasing populations could again be a concern for the forest industry as areas of Alberta experience milder winters.



Checking beetle counts in the Lindgren funnel traps

## **Resetting Revegetation Trajectory on Legacy Seismic Lines**

Restoration treatments reduce the site limiting factors such as soil compaction and continual reuse of seismic lines, allowing planted seedlings and natural ingress to establish and thrive.

Legacy seismic lines were expected to recover on their own; but over time, as reuse has damaged vegetation and created compacted soil conditions, many lines have not reestablished vegetation. Combined with other forest uses, these linear features have disrupted the habitats of many types of wildlife, including caribou. Westcore Contracting Inc. recognizes the importance of limiting contact with wildlife and are committed to reconstructing healthy ecosystems. They initiated a project in the fall of 2021 to restore woodland caribou habitat with methods that will support healthy and selfsustaining caribou populations by aggressively treating and reforesting 456 kilometres of legacy seismic lines.

"I'm happy with what we've done; it's been going really well. We've brought a lot of background and that's an asset. I feel it went exceptionally well," said Dale Kramer, owner and general manager of Westcore Contracting Inc. on the ongoing project. Its objectives included restoring caribou habitat and ecological function to a broad area of boreal forest in the Little Smoky caribou range by treating persistent legacy seismic lines to limit human and predator movement.

Site preparation work included mounding and screefing the soils to reduce compaction and competing vegetation, overlapped with tree tipping and stem bending to limit access and ease of movement. Tree planting occurred in August of 2022 to further achieve the restoration goal. Westcore strove to maintain the existing advanced regeneration while working in critical areas to increase the contiguous caribou habitat. They received funding through FRIAA's **Caribou Habitat Recovery Program.** 

Upon reflecting on the work completed and left to do, Kramer says, "There's still a lot of innovation to be done. We innovated a lot in our first season, but there's a lot I'd like to try in the future to reduce costs and increase efficiencies. It's good to try new things and see that they worked."

## Wildland–Urban Interface Field Exercise

The FireSmart disciplines offer a range of tools that are used throughout the province and country to increase community resilience to wildfires. In Alberta, there were approximately 1,100 wildfires from January 2022 through August 2022. Many of these could have become a threat to a community. The Town of Canmore took the initiative to increase awareness and proactively test their readiness within the local community, with a project funded by **FRIAA FireSmart.** 

"It was great to be able to bring together so many of our jurisdictional and mutual aidpartners. We had fire departments from one end of the valley to the other. We made it a Bow Valley project; Parks Canada was involved too. It was a great opportunity to bring those groups of people together that we would rely on if a real incident were to take place. The exercise did exactly what we wanted it to do: It tested our plans and showed us things that worked well and others that needed improvement," says Keri Martens, deputy fire chief and project manager.

The main goal to increase resilience of the community included implementing an exercise and evaluating the actions of participants. The Town of Canmore ran mock emergencies from June 3 to June 4, 2022, with various partners,

agencies, and corporations in order to run through a practise wildfire scenario. Participants co-operated on activities such as exercise planning, incident management and emergency response, sprinkler deployment, and evacuation. The Town of Banff; Kananaskis Improvement District; Parks Canada; Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development; Cochrane Search and Rescue; CAN-TF2; RCMP; Municipal District of Bighorn; etc., were all invited to participate. The exercise successfully enhanced interagency co-operation and helped the community better prepare for future wildfire incidents.

"The community response was great. Residents came out and watched what we were doing. They were really interested and engaged and thought it was great that we were doing it and that we were able to run the exercise. Being able to bring everyone together for the exercise was a great opportunity and it was an awesome weekend."

Martens adds, "(This project) would've been a lot more difficult to do without FRIAA's support. We're really grateful for the program. A lot of the stuff we've been able to do is because we've had access to that grant program."

Live, interagency field exercise operations in Canmore, Alberta





### **Sheep Grazing for Reforestation**

Sheep grazing for vegetation competition removal

While a proven measure to combat competitive vegetation such as grasses and deciduous trees, the use of herbicides in reforestation isn't always suitable. After consulting with nearby Horse Lake First Nation, Weyerhaeuser Company Limited tested sheep grazing instead of applying glyphosate to vegetation in the Saddle Hills region northwest of Grande Prairie, due to the proximity of the First Nation's traditional lands.

Although preliminary, the results of this **Forest Resource Improvement Program** trial showed promising results for future testing and the further use of sheep in this capacity. Significant decreases in competing vegetation were measured in the areas after the sheep grazed, while damage caused to the planted trees was minimal.

When it comes to controlling competing vegetation, "This (sheep grazing) is the next best thing to glyphosate," says Tyler Niles, Weyerhaeuser project manager. While he notes that there are still many issues to resolve, he

anticipates seeing a lot more attention to this program in the near future and to its use in actual forestry operations.

Niles's optimism also stems from the increase in knowledge that will come as more forestry companies take note of this approach and begin trials of their own across Alberta. "That's what's so beneficial about these FRIAA projects: Insight gained by one organization is shared with all the others, and no one has to start from scratch with a project that is already established elsewhere."

Herbicide use is a common method of vegetation control in forestry, but projects like this will help pave the way to providing land managers and operators with more options. The use of sheep-grazing demonstrates an effective alternative for sensitive areas. It could also lead to a new area of employment in the forestry industry while further strengthening the relationship between industry partners and stakeholders.

### FRIAA Annual Program Survey Results

In May 2022, 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 61 responded (a total response rate of 19%), slightly lower than the previous year's response rate. About 67% of respondents provided either a name or organizational affiliation, even though they were given the option to remain anonymous. Respondents could identify with multiple programs, which resulted in 61 respondents providing 108 responses—an indication that several stakeholders are engaging in more than one of FRIAA's programs.

Involvement with FRIAA's programs was met with overwhelming satisfaction from most respondents: 103 of 108 described themselves as neutral, satisfied, or very satisfied. One respondent was not satisfied with CHRP and FRIAA FireSmart programs, and another was not satisfied with CRP, feedback that we have followed up on.

### How did FRIAA respond?

- We shifted most payments to electronic fund transfers (EFTs) to speed up the process.
  Please ask for an EFT form if you'd like to sign up for this.
- We reallocated staff, streamlined processes, and automated a few tasks in order to facilitate payments and review of reporting.

Program descriptions and outlines are available on each program's page on the FRIAA website to provide information on its purpose, objective, and eligible activities. See www.friaa.ab.ca/programs/.

To submit proposals, amendments, progress and final reports, payment requests, deliverables, and other documents for all programs, visit http://friaa.ab.ca/program-submissions/.



## FRIAA FUN FACTS

### Highlights from FRIAA's 2021–22 Annual Report

FRIAA celebrates 25 years of service (1997–2022) to the people of Alberta.

FRIAA provided funding under 10 programs to support important provincial priorities.

Money spent on administration relative to total spending was 3.3%.

The Forest Resource Improvement Program saw over \$36 million in project payments and another \$68.6 million committed to new projects. FRIAA's programs clearly support the Province's three priorities: protecting lives, protecting livelihoods, and being fiscally responsible.

FRIAA paid out over \$69 million for worthwhile projects under all programs.

A record year in lumber markets drove Crown timber dues and FRIAA dues to unprecedented levels, enabling us to support longer-term initiatives.

The **Community Reforestation Program** planted over one million seedlings and collected \$1.8 million in reforestation levies. The Wildfire Reclamation Program supported the purchase and planting of almost 5 million seedlings.

Since its inception, **FRIAA FireSmart** has approved 417 projects that help protect Alberta's people, infrastructure, property, and environment though reducing the threat of wildfire to communities.

The **FRIAA Forest-Sector COVID Safety Measures Program** provided over \$3.0 million to small and medium-sized businesses. This program is now closed. The **Caribou Habitat Recovery Program** invested \$7.5 million for restoration activities that promoted caribou habitat recovery. To date, CHRP has restored 542 km, prepared operational planning for 1,931 km, and conducted vegetation inventory on 58,179 km.

The **Community Fireguard Construction Program** paid \$10.4 million. Over its two-year lifespan, we invested over \$19.4 million in projects.

Find a copy of the report here.

## **Program Funding Awards**

Early morning fog snakes along the Wapiti River valley, southwest of Grande Prairie. The view overlooks the prairie-parkland interface.

### Caribou Habitat Recovery Program (CHRP)

On March 24, 2022, FRIAA published a request for proposals (RFP) for **vegetation inventory** in the **Chinchaga** and **West Side Athabasca River** caribou ranges. Five proposals were received. Both ranges were awarded to **Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute**.

On March 31, 2022, FRIAA published two RFPs for **survival assessments** in the A La Peche and Cold Lake caribou ranges. Four proposals were received. **A La Peche** was awarded to **Carson Integrated** and **Cold Lake** was awarded to **CCI Inc.** 

On April 4, 2022, FRIAA published a request for expressions of interest (RFEOI) for **updated planning and restoration** in the **Little Smoky** caribou range, compartments LSM1 (partial) and LSM4. Five expressions of interest were received. The project was awarded to **Westcore Contracting Inc.** 





Legacy seismic line restoration. Coarse woody material is placed on the line for access blocking. Mechanical soil site preparation and deactivation techniques promote seedling establishment. Westcore Contracting delivered this CHRP project work in the Little Smoky caribou range.

### **FRIAA FireSmart**

The January 2022 FRIAA FireSmart RFEOI received 22 applications, asking for a total of \$656,613. In May 2022, the review committee approved 16 proposals for \$283,305.

Approved projects include:

- 10 for FireSmart planning,
- 1 for legislation and planning,
- 1 for public education, and
- 4 for inter-agency co-operation.

See the full list of approved projects.

Below are a couple of examples:

### Woodlands County Wildfire Hazard & Risk Assessment and Wildfire Mitigation Strategy

(Woodlands County)

Discipline: FireSmart planning

Term: June 2022 to October 2022

**Objective:** Evaluate the regional wildfire environment of Woodlands County and surrounding communities by identifying wildland–urban interface hazards. Mitigate interface fires through development control and emergency planning initiatives.

### Southeast Alberta Regional Fire Services Tabletop Exercise

(City of Medicine Hat)

Discipline: Inter-agency co-operation

Term: May 2022 to July 2022

**Objective:** Complete a tabletop exercise through an artificial intelligence model of a simulated wildfire and evacuation of the Saamis Heights subdivision. The exercise will provide for discussion of a simulated wildfire as well as a review of four potential secondary egress routes to aid in evacuations.



The Town of Canmore recently delivered a live interagency training exercise to prepare for an incoming wildfire scenario under FRIAA FireSmart.

Overlooking Alberta's vast boreal forest and foothills in the westcentral regior

### New Funding Announcement

### Enhanced Reforestation of Legacy Disturbances: RFP for 2023 Site Assessment Project

Following natural disturbance, regeneration of forests can be delayed significantly. Through partnership with Alberta Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development, the EnRLD Program was created to improve the rate at which Alberta's public lands can regenerate after being destroyed by wildfires. The EnRLD Program also aims to increase carbon sequestration and mitigate the effects of climate change through these reforestation efforts.

The purpose of this request for proposals is to help FRIAA assist in regenerating Alberta's public lands by providing detailed site assessments of areas affected by recent wildfires (i.e., within the last five years). The successful applicant will be required to conduct an initial site assessment and provide silviculture prescriptions based on the detailed assessment information collected. The deadline for proposal submissions is January 9, 2023, 16:00 MST.

For more information on FRIAA's Enhanced Reforestation of Legacy Disturbances Program and this RFP, please click here.

### FRIAA FireSmart: RFP by invitation for FireSmart projects

FRIAA FireSmart's most recent RFEOI closed September 12, 2022. Project applicants will be shortlisted and invited to submit detailed proposals that will be due by November 14<sup>th</sup>. Successful applicants will be notified in mid-December, followed by project kick-offs.





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### TO BE ADDED TO THE EMAIL LIST, PLEASE CONTACT FRIAA AT: PHONE: 780-429-5873 FAX: 780-429-4026 EMAIL: admin@friaa.ab.ca WEB: friaa.ab.ca





