
BRANCHING OUT

SEPTEMBER 2023



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:
Gooseberry (*Ribes* sp.)

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Cotton grass
(*Eriophorum* sp.)

President's Message



On behalf of the FRIAA board of directors, I hope everyone was able to take some time to enjoy the summer. Over the past few months, the FRIAA team has been working hard with the July launch of our newly redeveloped submission portal. The new portal is intended to better serve the needs of our members by creating a self-serve interface for applications, payment requests, data uploads, and project status updates. We will continue to improve the site as we strive to best serve your needs.

In May, 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 has completed the 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 the exciting accomplishments under the various FRIAA programs.

In this edition of *Branching Out*, we are pleased to share stories on the restoration success seen on linear seismic lines with the Caribou Habitat Recovery Program and on Forest Resource Improvement Program-funded research on breeding birds in harvested and unharvested boreal stands. In addition, as wildfire continues to be a prominent feature on the Alberta landscape, we have included an update on FRIAA's ongoing commitments through the Wildfire Reclamation Program.

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

In closing, I would like to wish everyone a pleasant autumn. 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, appearing to read 'R. Briand'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a vertical line separating it from the printed name.

Richard Briand
President, FRIAA

Project Stories

Cutblock at
E.S. Huestis
Demonstration
Forest



Breeding Bird Survey in Recently Harvested and Unharvested Boreal Stands

The boreal forest is crucial nesting and migratory stopover habitat for over a billion birds. Maintaining breeding habitats in the boreal forest is critical to avoiding the negative consequences of bird community shifts that could have far-reaching impacts on global ecosystems, human recreation, and industry.

Boreal songbirds are good indicators of forest health because they quickly respond to changes in habitat conditions. To maintain biodiversity and ecosystem services in the boreal forest, it's important to understand how these birds are using habitats on a small scale. Vanderwell Contractors (1979) Ltd. (Vanderwell) sponsored the Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory (LSLBO) through the **Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP)** to complete a breeding bird survey over three years in the boreal forest in north-central Alberta. The survey sought to understand the distribution of bird species in young forest stands (post harvest) stratified into three age classes of ten-year increments (1 to 10, 11 to 20, and 21 to 30), and mature unharvested stands. "There is a lot of data on songbird population within the first five years of cutblock regeneration, but there is a significant data gap past that five-year mark," says Robyn Perkins, LSLBO's bander-in-charge.

The survey recorded 4,980 birds from 95 species across 373 point-count stations. "Not all cutblocks are created equally," says Perkins. "Differences can be detected within the first 11 years of a cutblock's regeneration."

The study found that overall bird abundance, species richness, and diversity varied across forest classifications, with the highest abundances observed in mixedwood cutblocks that are 11 to 20 years of age. Species richness tended to increase as stand age increased. The study noted that coniferous stands were often richer than mixedwood stands of the same age. The study contributes essential information to help manage and maintain biodiversity and ecosystem services on a landscape level.

"This project ended up being a great mutual collaboration with Vanderwell," continues Perkins. "Vanderwell wanted to understand how their cutblocks were linked to the overall biodiversity impact on their land base, and FRIP funding provided the resources to allow LSLBO to undertake this large research project."





Survival Assessments on Linear Seismic Lines in Caribou Habitat

Antler shed observed along restored seismic line

Caribou habitat restoration within Alberta is ongoing, and effective restoration of legacy seismic lines is essential for success. Located 35 km east of Grand Cache, the linear restoration program of the A La Peche caribou range was implemented in 2019 and 2020. Funded by the **Caribou Habitat Recovery Program (CHRP)**, legacy seismic lines were treated using a variety of strategies including ripping, mounding, rollback, and line deactivation. In total, 27 km of seismic lines were planted with 24,300 seedlings. In the summer of 2022, CHRP provided funding for Carson Integrated to complete survival assessments on the A La Peche restoration project.

The survival assessments established and measured 26 plots stratified across treatments and site types. Survival assessments typically occur two to four years after tree planting and are crucial to determining the condition of planted seedlings.

“The benefit of completing survival assessments after two years is that you are able to identify

areas that may need intervention early on. This is especially important if the project was piloting different restoration approaches,” says Toni Anderson, project manager.

During the survival assessment, some western gall rust was observed, and in some locations there was significant competition from grass and shrubs. Despite this, assessment results revealed the survival of planted sites was as high as 96%. Planting density prescriptions were met or exceeded on most line segments, and many sites saw natural ingress along treatment lines.

“From our observations, seedling survival was highest on mounded sites and seemed to be the key to reducing human use,” says Anderson. The results indicate that many line segments are on a trajectory to a re-forested state.

“This project tested direct planting in some areas, where steep slopes limited the use of heavy machinery. I was excited to see if this technique would be successful. Overall,

these sites passed their survival assessment; however, it was clear that compaction remained a site limiting factor. I think this is a great option to keep in our toolbox for use on steep slopes, but I would not recommend this approach for large treatment areas."

Overall, restoration efforts have been successful. This project shows the importance

of site preparation for habitat restoration on linear features, and the results from this project can help inform future restoration projects to achieve the CHRP goals. On the results of the assessment, Anderson says, "After working on many caribou habitat restoration projects over the years, it was really great to see the treatments are working."



Planted larch on mounds measured during survival assessment

Continued Commitment to Wildfire Reclamation

Since 2006, the **Wildfire Reclamation Program (WRP)** has supported activities to reclaim and reforest previously reforested harvested areas that were damaged or destroyed by wildfires. The WRP assists organizations wanting to undertake supplemental activities to reforest these areas again. All WRP funds are committed to reforestation activities, and none of these funds can be used for reforestation activities that are the regulatory or tenure responsibility of any forest company. The WRP supports companies throughout the duration of reforestation activities. Eligible activities include surveys, site preparation, planting, seeding, administrative costs, and others. The WRP strives to overcome the costly and negative impacts of wildfire.

In 2017–18 the WRP was renewed for another 10 years. The 2022/23 fiscal year marks the halfway mark under this agreement. To acknowledge this milestone, we wanted to share some highlights of this program to date. Looking forward, FRIAA will continue to manage the WRP program and allocate funds directly toward resource improvement and long-term sustainability.

WRP by the Numbers:

- As of the end of March 2023, \$97,026,916 in grant funding has been received through this program.
- To date, over 64 million seedlings have been planted under the program.
- As of the end of March 2023, 75 approved WRP projects were active, with outstanding commitments of \$21,443,759.

Cutblock burned by wildfire
near High Level, Alberta



Wildfire Reclamation Program Area and Funding by Year

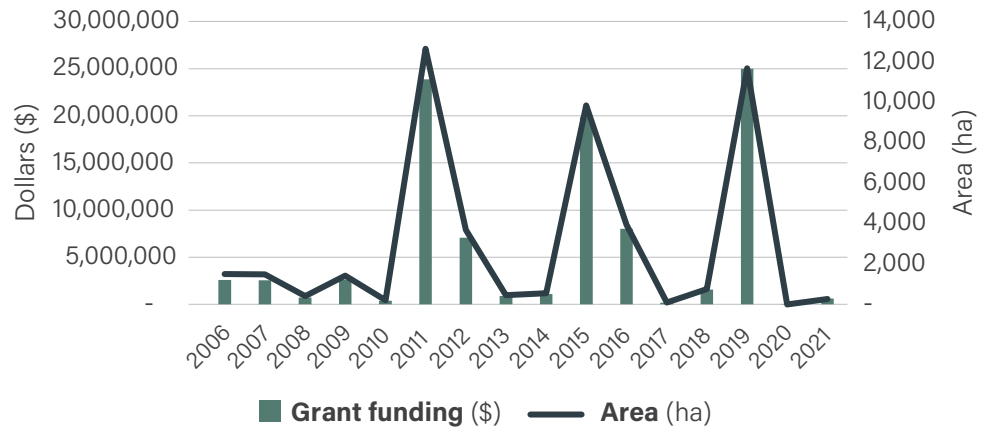


Figure 1: Illustration of annual funding granted based on the area of previously reforested harvested cutblocks that have been damaged or destroyed by wildfire.

Activities Completed Since Inception (ha)

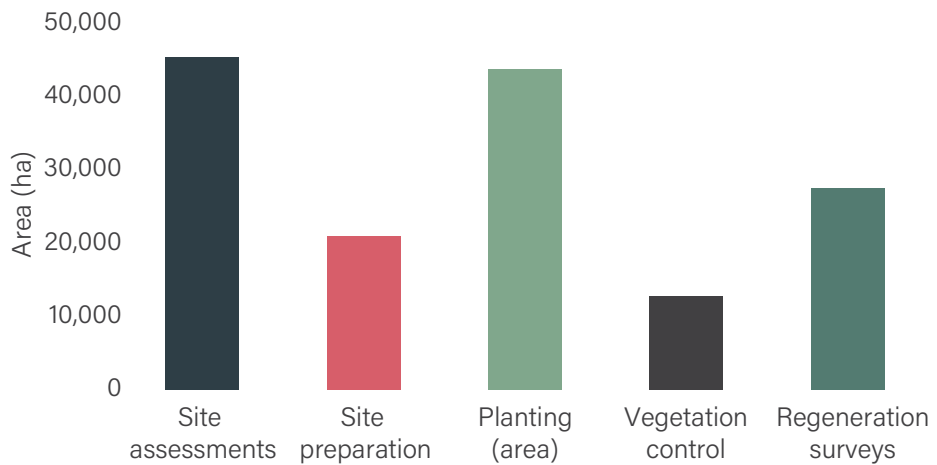


Figure 2: Illustration of activities completed in WRP by area.



FRIAA Annual Program Survey Results

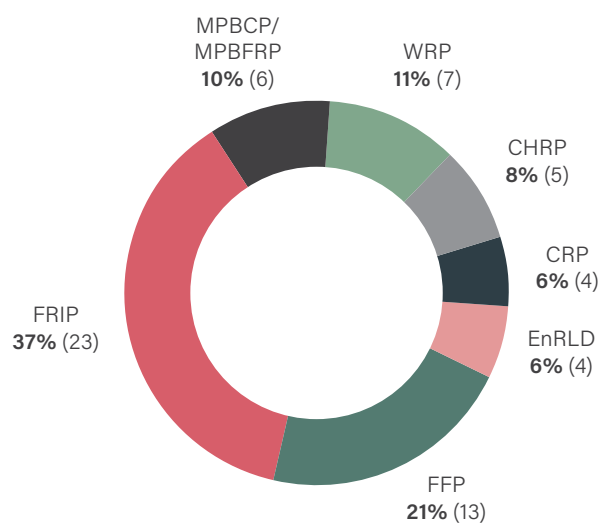
Bunchberry
(*Cornus canadensis*)

In April 2023, stakeholders who had engaged with FRIAA's programs in the past year were invited to participate in our annual program review. A total of 211 stakeholders received the emailed survey and 38 responded (a total response rate of 18%), slightly lower than the previous year's response rate. About 55% 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 38 respondents providing 62 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: 58 respondents were neutral, satisfied, or very satisfied. One respondent was not satisfied with CHRP, and three were not satisfied with FRIP. No stakeholders reported being very unsatisfied.

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

Response rate by program



FRIAA FUN FACTS

Highlights from FRIAA's 2022–23 Annual Report

FRIAA's programs support the Province's three priorities of enhancing government services now and in the future, growing Alberta's economy, and fiscal sustainability.

FRIAA provided funding under 8 programs to support important provincial priorities.

FRIAA developed a strategic plan for the **Forest Resource Improvement Program** to guide the use of these funds over the next 5 to 10 years.

Money spent on administration relative to total spending was 3.98%.

The **Forest Resource Improvement Program** saw over \$42 million in project payments and another \$153 million committed to new projects.

In 2022–23 the **Community Reforestation Program** planted over 1.5 million seedlings on 1,039 hectares.

To date, the **Mountain Pine Beetle Program** has distributed over \$36.1 million to key projects delivered by members and their contractors.

The **Caribou Habitat Recovery Program** has contributed over \$9.4 million for restoration activities that promoted caribou habitat recovery. To date, CHRP has restored 1,200 km, prepared operational planning for 3,509 km, and conducted vegetation inventory on 64,646 km.

Since its inception, **FRIAA FireSmart** has approved 455 projects that help protect Alberta's people, infrastructure, property, and environment through reducing fire hazard.

Since its inception, the **Enhanced Reforestation of Legacy Disturbances Program** has distributed or committed over \$8.3 million in funding.

New Program Submission Portal

Over the past two years FRIAA has been working to develop a new integrated platform for program submissions and tracking. We are pleased to announce that we launched our new submission portal this summer. Its primary aim is to better serve the needs of our audiences by creating a self-serve interface.

Highlights of the new portal include:

- Acknowledgement that the submission has been received.
- Individual applicant login for organizations: Stores previous submitted applications, projects, and milestones.
- Interactive dashboard that displays current funding opportunities, milestones, projects, and applications for organizations.
- Messaging centre that can link message conversations to specific projects and applications.
- Full project list of active and completed projects for individual organizations, including

project status, payment summary, upcoming milestones, related messages, and project reviews completed.

- Milestones summary of all submitted and upcoming milestones across all projects for an individual organization.
- Submission records of previously submitted applications, and current application status.

FRIAA members will also be able to view a list of sponsored projects and to access Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP) transaction detail reports and sponsorship reports for their organization.

We're excited about our new site, and we will continue to improve it as we strive to best serve your needs. To submit proposals, amendments, progress and final reports, payment requests, deliverables, and other documents for all programs, you can access the new submission portal at <http://friaa.ab.ca/program-submissions/>.



Nez Perce Creek,
Coleman, Alberta

Program Funding Awards



Caribou Habitat Recovery Program (CHRP)

In April 2023, FRIAA published a request for proposal for **survival assessment** on the West Clyde Project completed by Cenovus in 2021. Two proposals were received. The project was awarded to **Matrix Solutions Inc.**

Seedling
planted
in Little
Smokey
caribou
range



FRIAA FireSmart Program

The January 2023 FRIAA FireSmart request for expressions of interest (RFEI) received 57 applications, asking for a total of \$4,984,464.19. In June 2023, the Review Committee approved 47 proposals for \$4,236,146.69.

Approved projects include:

- 15 for FireSmart planning;
- 1 for inter-agency co-operation; and
- 1 for legislation and planning;
- 26 for vegetation/fuel management.
- 4 for public education;

See the full list of approved projects at <https://friaa.ab.ca/programs/friaa-firesmart/>.

Below are a couple of examples:

Horse Lake First Nation Wildfire Hazard and Risk Assessment

(Horse Lake First Nation)

Discipline: FireSmart planning

Term: June 2023 to April 2024

Objective: Develop a wildlife hazard and risk assessment and wildfire preparedness guide.

Greenview: Sturgeon Heights Community FireSmart Education and Awareness Program

(Municipal District of Greenview)

Discipline: Public education

Term: May to November 2023

Objective: Deliver 50 home assessments, complete several public education events, and develop supporting FireSmart promotional materials.

Town of High Level Tabletop Exercise

(Town of High Level)

Discipline: Inter-agency co-operation

Term: April to October 2023

Objective: Complete a tabletop exercise to respond to a wildfire in the wildland urban interface, to exercise wildfire preparedness and sprinkler deployment, and co-operate with other responding agencies.

Loon River – Vegetation Management 2023

(Loon River First Nation #235)

Discipline: Vegetation management

Term: July 2023 to March 2024

Objective: Manage 9.7 hectares of vegetation through thinning, pruning, and removing buildup from hazardous fuels. Dispose of debris through pile and burn.



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