
BRANCHING OUT

JUNE 2024



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:
White spruce (*Picea glauca*) cone and needles, boreal forest near Whitecourt, Alberta

CONTENTS

President's Message	3
Project Stories	4
Pileated Woodpecker Nesting-Cavity Guidance (FRIP)	5
Supporting Sustainable Reforestation Practices (CRP)	6
A FireSmart Success Story – Rainbow Lake (FFP)	8
Re-instating the Community FireGuard Program	10
Program Funding Awards	12
CHRP	13
FFP	14
EnRLD	15
MPBP	15

Trembling aspen, (*Populus tremuloides*) stem,
boreal forest, near Whitecourt, Alberta

President's Message



As we prepare for FRIAA's annual general meeting on June 17, 2024, it seems appropriate to reflect on another successful year. While the annual report will be released at the AGM, a couple notable highlights include a significant drop in FRIAA dues under the Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP), as lumber prices settle into a lower pattern in the rear-view mirror of the recent record lumber prices. Conversely, program expenditures in FRIP were a record high at \$46 million. The multi-year project commitments made under FRIP will support activities to enhance Alberta's forests now and into the future. You will be able to read the full annual report on our website, following the AGM.

In the Community Reforestation Program (CRP), FRIAA struck a balance of collecting \$2.1 million in reforestation levies and making program expenditures of \$2 million. These funds are committed to outstanding reforestation work over the next 14 years. You can read more about the important work in CRP in our first feature story on sustainable forest practices in this June 2024 *Branching Out*.

The other feature stories highlight the impacts of conducting FireSmart work and continuing this practice over the long term, as recognized in Rainbow Lake in the spring of 2023. I'm sure we are all pleased to see a much quieter fire season so far this year. FRIAA is also pleased to announce a renewed program, launched this spring by Alberta Forestry and Parks: the Community FireGuard Program. FRIAA has invited proposals, and 18 communities have begun their planning work in anticipation of advancing onto clearing and construction when funding becomes available.

Several other programs have received funding in the past few months; you can read more details about these awards in the following pages. We would also like to share a story about a FRIP project, undertaken by one of our member companies, that documents the importance of pileated woodpeckers as cavity nesters and how to recognize their habitat. The board and FRIAA management team welcome your feedback and invite 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', written in a cursive style.

Richard Briand
President, FRIAA

Project Stories

Fireweed
(*Chamerion
angustifolium*)
in a
regenerating
cutblock,
boreal
forest near
Whitcourt,
Alberta

Pileated Woodpecker Nesting-Cavity Information and Guidance

Pileated
woodpecker,
(*Dryocopus*
pileatus)

In July 2022, Environmental and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) modernized the Migratory Bird Regulations to provide protection to migratory bird nests when they are considered to have a higher conservation value for migratory birds. The Pileated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*) is one such species, and the cavities they create are protected year-round. With funds from the **Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP)**, West Fraser Mills Ltd. created guidance and training information on pileated woodpecker cavity nest identification to address changes to the federal Migratory Bird Regulations.

The protection of pileated woodpecker cavities is important because they can be reused by several secondary nesters. Pileated woodpeckers nest in the forested landscape, making training and knowledge-sharing an important step to sustainable forest management. Emily Cicon, habitat/wildlife biologist at Fraser (and project lead) spoke on the importance of this project and team: "Projects like this build a bridge between expert knowledge and on-the-ground operations. A well-informed team encourages the discussion, questions, and interest that support constant improvement to sustainable forestry practices in Alberta."

To achieve the project objective, STRIX Ecological Consulting Ltd. summarized knowledge on pileated woodpecker into accessible mediums including training slides,

a standard operating procedure, and a printable brochure. "We got to work with very talented professionals on the development of the materials, including a bird expert from STRIX Ecological and a fantastic design team at RED the Agency. Working with external contractors for this project helped to elevate the end products, and it was exciting to receive the next draft to see what was being crafted," said Cicon. Information included identification tips, preferred habitats, and best management practices.

The materials and knowledge will ultimately lead to improved wildlife habitat and avian biodiversity in managed forests. "This project created additional resources for forestry staff and contractors, increasing their knowledge of pileated woodpeckers. This type of information-sharing is critical for staff to understand policies and guidance, such as those under the recently updated Migratory Birds Regulations; however, it also has an important role in building confidence and skills to identify not only the bird and its nest cavities but on-the-ground cues that indicate good pileated habitat," said Cicon.

Mark Phinney, habitat biologist at Canadian Forest Products Ltd. spoke about the work completed to date: "The brochure has been very effective during field-crew training sessions to help them identify pileated woodpecker nesting cavities and recognizing the value of these important habitat features."

The Community Reforestation Program and Supporting Sustainable Reforestation Practices

The **Community Reforestation Program (CRP)** plays a significant role in promoting sustainable forestry on Alberta's land base since CRP's establishment in 2000. For the past 23 years, the program has been assisting commercial timber permit (CTP) holders with reforestation following harvest. The permit-holders pay a levy to FRIAA to carry out reforestation obligations as directed by the province.

All reforestation activities follow the Reforestation Standards of Alberta and are carried out by qualified CRP service providers. Activities implemented through the program include site assessments, mechanical site preparation, tree planting, vegetation management, and regeneration surveys. All openings under the program are monitored until a successful performance survey is conducted between years 11 and 14.

As of the 2024 timber year, 40,153 hectares have been harvested and 25,640 hectares have had all reforestation obligations completed under the CRP. Currently 14,513 hectares are being actively treated.

The program's objectives have been consistent since establishment in maintaining long-term sustainability and meeting reforestation standards. The success of this program could not have been achieved without the hard work of service providers and their diligence in planning and executing reforestation activities throughout the province.

A spider living on a white spruce seedling in a reforested cutblock near Whitecourt, Alberta



A thriving white spruce (*Picea glauca*) seedling in a CRP reforested cutblock



Common cattail (*Typha latifolia*) within a regenerating white spruce cutblock, in front of a mature mixedwood forest. Diverse landscapes are part of the boreal forest.



2023-24 Number of Active Projects

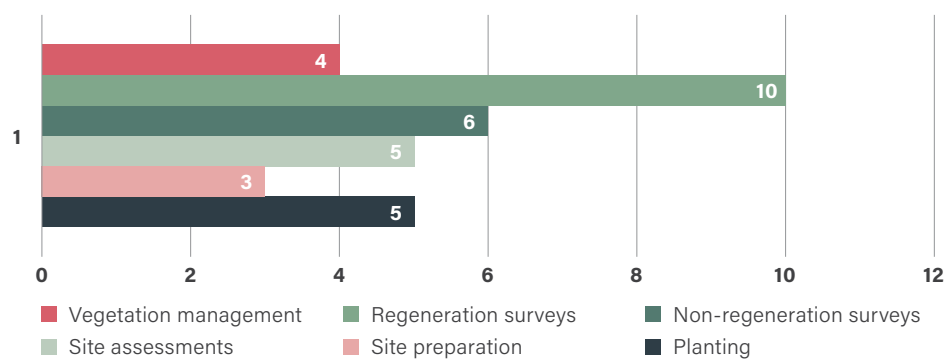


Chart 1: Number of active Community Reforestation Program projects in 2023-24

2023-24 Project Area (Hectares)

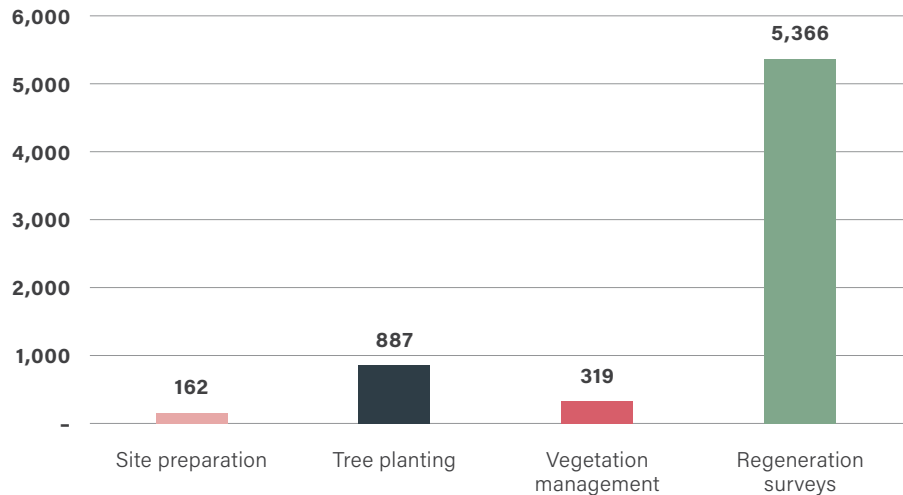


Chart 2: Area completed in 2023-24

In the Caribou Habitat Recovery Program, traditional site preparation and tree planting reforestation techniques are used, just like in the CRP. Pictured: the West Clyde legacy seismic line restoration project, in the Cold Lake caribou range.





The Town of Rainbow Lake: A FireSmart Success Story

A similar example of a fireguard, constructed by Whitefish Lake First Nation in Atikameg, Alberta, under the Community Fireguard Construction Program

Located in northern Alberta and surrounded by spruce trees, Rainbow Lake is a community of about 700 people. On May 3, 2023, a fire was detected on the southwest side of the Town of Rainbow Lake. The fire was threatening the community. By May 6 the community was under mandatory evacuation order. All non-essential personnel packed their vehicles and left on the one road in and out of town. According to Dan Fletcher, the town manager, Rainbow Lake was given a 4% chance of surviving this fire. To say the odds were stacked against them would be an understatement. As the fire grew, it completely circled the community and, over the next several days, firefighters fought the fire on all sides of the community, using backburning from the fireguards and fuel breaks to keep the fire further from the town. After 27 wrenching days, the fire threat was removed, the evacuation order was lifted, and community members were able to return. Rainbow Lake beat the odds. The firefighters were able to save all structures in the community—not a single one was lost.

Fletcher attributes the success to long-term fire planning, ongoing fuel management and, most importantly, collaboration between the forest industry, provincial government agencies, and the municipality.

In 2013 the municipality, with the provincial government, put together a 10-year vegetation management plan for the community. Over the next decade the municipality utilized provincial government funding programs as well as **FRIAA FireSmart** and the **FRIAA Community FireGuard Construction Program** to complete vegetation management treatments and fireguards around the borders of the town. By 2022 Rainbow Lake had thinned and guarded the entire town as per the 2013 plan.

While implementing the FRIAA FireGuard in 2020, one of the local timber companies, Tolko Industries Ltd., was brought into the strategy. This became the catalyst for two **Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP)** projects to explore wildfire spread

modelling and ignition exposure, and landscape fire risk management planning. A new harvest sequence around the community was developed to prioritize reducing areas of highest hazard. Reflecting on the work completed, Trevor Lafreniere of Tolko said: "It was really a collaborative effort of multiple stakeholders to put together a meaningful plan." Implementation began in 2022, and two of the five phases were complete before the fire started in 2023.

Looking back, it wasn't one thing that saved the town but the cumulative efforts of multiple parties working together. Fletcher echoes those sentiments: "We were able to utilize Tolko's harvested cutblocks, in conjunction with the vegetation thinning and the fuel breaks, to contain and maintain the fire." When asked about future plans, Fletcher said "For us, we'll be doing much the same. We've done 10 years of this, and the next 10 years we'll be doing it all over again."



A similar example of a fireguard, constructed by Loon River First Nation, Alberta, under the Community Fireguard Construction Program

Re-instating the Community FireGuard Program

FRIAA is pleased to announce the **Community FireGuard Program (CFP)**.

On December 7, 2023, Minister Loewen of Alberta Forestry and Parks announced the Province's \$5-million contribution towards providing municipalities with financial assistance to construct community fireguards in high-risk communities across the province and integrating livestock grazing as a vegetation-control-maintenance tactic and economic opportunity.

The purpose of the program is to support the Provincial FireSmart Program initiative by funding the construction of community fireguards that enhance public safety and strengthen the resilience of at-risk communities. Projects are to focus on protecting communities from the threat of wildfire, engaging local employment, and planning for long-term vegetation management through grazing (where feasible).

In March 2024, a call for proposals was issued for Phase 1: Planning under the CFP. Communities were asked to structure their work plan and deliverables into three phases:

- Phase 1 – Planning
- Phase 2 – Construction and Clearing
- Phase 3 – Grazing Site Preparations

On April 29, 2024, Minister Loewen announced that an additional \$14 million will be provided to the CFP. Communities engaged in the program will be invited to submit proposals for Phase 2: Construction. As funding becomes available, additional requests for proposals will be issued.

Eighteen communities were awarded grant funding awards for plan development under the community fireguard program, which will successfully put people and equipment to work.

Community Fireguard Construction Program, Bigstone Cree Nation, Chipewyan Lake, Alberta



Community	Forest Area
Clearwater County – Hamlet of Nordegg	Rocky Mountain House
Dene Tha First Nation – Bushe River	High Level
Dene Tha First Nation – Chateh	High Level
Dene Tha First Nation – Meander River	High Level
Driftpile Cree Nation	Slave Lake
Mackenzie County – La Crete	High Level
MD of Greenview – Nose Creek Settlement	Grande Prairie
MD Opportunity – Calling Lake	Lac La Biche
MD Opportunity – Red Earth Creek	Slave Lake
MD Opportunity – Sandy Lake	Slave Lake
Municipal District of Lesser Slave River – Broken Paddle	Slave Lake
Municipal District of Lesser Slave River – Marten Beach	Slave Lake
Pincher Creek Emergency Services – Castle Mountain Resort	Calgary
Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo – Janvier	Fort McMurray
Stoney Nakoda Nation – Eden Valley	Calgary
Sucker Creek First Nation	Slave Lake
Town of Canmore – Bow Corridor (Harvie Heights, Dead Man's Flats, Town of Canmore, Canmore Nordic Centre)	Calgary
Town of Whitecourt	Whitecourt
Whitefish Lake First Nation #128 (Goodfish)	Lac La Biche
Yellowhead County – Evansburg, Brule, Cadomin, Jasper Gate, Peers, Niton, Robb, Marlboro, Wildwood	Edson



Program Funding Awards

Mixedwood
stand, boreal
forest,
Alberta

Caribou Habitat Recovery Program (CHRP)

In November 2023, FRIAA published a request for proposals for **restoration** in the Clyde compartments in the Cold Lake caribou range. Six proposals were received. The project was awarded to **Westcore Contracting Ltd.** in December 2023 to complete site preparation treatments on 565 km by March 31, 2024.

In December 2023, FRIAA published a request for proposals for operational **planning** in the Caribou Mountains, Richardson, Yates, and Cold Lake caribou ranges. Six proposals were received. In March 2024, projects were awarded to **Silvacom Ltd.** for Caribou Mountains and Yates, and to **Carson Integrated** for Richardson and Cold Lake.



Legacy seismic line restoration and line deactivation, Little Smoky caribou range, Alberta

FRIAA FireSmart Program

The June 2023 FRIAA FireSmart request for expressions of interest (RFEI/RFP) received 41 applications, asking for a total of \$4,859,989.29. In October and December, the review committee approved 31 proposals for \$2,868,965.79.

Approved projects include:

- 5 for FireSmart planning;
- 8 for public education;
- 1 for inter-agency co-operation; and
- 17 for vegetation/fuel management.

See the full list of approved projects [here](#).

Below are a few examples:

Duncan's First Nation: Hazard and Risk Planning

(Duncan's First Nation)

Discipline: FireSmart planning

Term: October 2023 to April 2024

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

2024 FireSmart Programming

(Lac La Biche County)

Discipline: Public education

Term: October 2023 to December 2024

Objective: Deliver 80 home assessments, complete 8 public education events, and provide chipping services for 25 properties in Lac La Biche County.

City of Grande Prairie Vegetation Management

(City of Grande Prairie)

Discipline: Vegetation management

Term: December 2023 to December 2024

Objective: Manage 17 hectares of vegetation in the Grande Banks and South Bear Creek Area through thinning, pruning, and removing buildup from hazardous fuels.

Enhanced Reforestation of Legacy Disturbances Program, planted burn, Fort McMurray, Alberta



FRIAA FireSmart Program, thin, prune, mulch fuel modification at Crane Lake, Alberta



Enhanced Reforestation of Legacy Disturbances Program, planted spruce seedling in old burn, Fort McMurray, Alberta



Enhanced Reforestation of Legacy Disturbances Program (EnRLD)

In April 2024, FRIAA published a request for proposals for **2024 site assessments** in the Peace River and Slave Lake Forest Areas. Three proposals were received. In May 2024, the project was awarded to **Carson Integrated Ltd.**

Mountain Pine Beetle Program (MPBP)

FRIAA was asked by the Department of Forestry and Parks to integrate and administer the Provincial Mountain Pine Beetle Municipal Grant Funding Subprogram under the MPBP. In March 2024 an application from a municipality within the Leading Edge Zone was received from the **Town of Canmore**, to conduct ground surveys and control a number of trees. This project was approved in April 2024.

In February 2024, FRIAA published a request for proposals for eligible mountain pine beetle control activities. Four proposals were received. In April 2024, two projects were awarded to **Canadian Forest Products Ltd.**: one to **Hinton Wood Products – A Division of West Fraser Mills Ltd.** and one to **Sundre Forest Products Inc.**

Mountain Pine Beetle Program, checking traps, Blue Ridge Lumber log yard





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