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# BRANCHING OUT

MARCH 2025

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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 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:  
Mature pine stand located in Little Smoky Caribou Range

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Spruce tree in snow,  
located near Fox Creek, AB

# President's Message



Greetings on behalf of the FRIAA board of directors. As we spring forward, we are filled with renewed energy and optimism. Spring brings with it a sense of rebirth and a fresh start, encouraging us to reflect on our achievements and look forward to the future.

In this edition of *Branching Out*, we present several projects that are underway in the Forest Resource Improvement Program. The first story discusses the integration of traditional knowledge in climate change adaptation. The second story covers the Envirothon education competition, including the upcoming National Envirothon in Calgary in July. The third story outlines the trout habitat rehabilitation projects in the Waiparous Creek watershed. The final feature story details the upgrades to Kidney Lake Forest Field camp, aimed at providing a comfortable and modern environment for first-year NAIT students beginning their forestry careers.

We're excited to share updates of program grant funding awards in the Community Fireguard and FRIAA FireSmart programs. Looking forward, we expect to hold FRIAA's annual general meeting in June, in Edmonton. More information will follow in due course.

As always, we welcome your feedback and invite you to connect with us via [admin@friaa.ab.ca](mailto:admin@friaa.ab.ca). Your input is highly valued.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Briand'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

**Richard Briand**  
President, FRIAA





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# Project Stories

Community  
Forest Zone  
near Bistcho  
Lake, AB





# Assessing Climate Change Vulnerability with the Dene Tha' First Nation

Petitot River  
near Bistcho  
Lake, AB

The Dene Tha' First Nation (DTFN) or People Common to the Territory, or Common Peoples, Traditional Territory is in Treaty 8 and 11 and overlaps what is now Alberta, British Columbia, and Northwest Territories. Through the **Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP)** the DTFN and Tolko Industries Ltd. worked together to complete a climate change vulnerability assessment (CCVA) within the northwestern part of Alberta. The CCVA is a workbook developed by the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers Climate Change Task Force; it is a guide for resource professionals to assist in the assessment of forest vulnerability and adaptation planning for sustainable forest management.

The Lands Department of the DTFN agreed to share their ecological and cultural data with Tolko to inform the CCVA. "The largest benefit in completing the assessment is that it raised awareness within the community about the impacts that climate change could have on the local forest," says Trevor Lafreniere, manager of planning and sustainability at Tolko Industries

Ltd. "Prior to this project, climate change was something you read about in the news; there had been no direct conversations about it or how it could impact the forests around their community. Completing this project has provided a baseline of information to build upon and allows the companies and the DTFN to develop strategies to mitigate the local impacts of climate change."

Combining the DTFN's traditional ecological knowledge with forest measurements, wildfire data, and climate data, the CCVA will help to inform forest management plans and decision-making to better protect DTFN Treaty-rights-based activities into the foreseeable future.

Through the completion of the assessment, a localized approach is envisioned for the area. This approach would allow for foresters to make decisions within the community forest zones that respect and benefit both the DTFN and non-timber values, ensuring protection of the forest resource into the future.

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# Support for the Alberta Envirothon Provincial and National Competitions

Established in 1997, The Alberta Envirothon is a team-based academic environmental education competition for high school students with the goal of increasing students' knowledge of environmental science and natural resource management in Alberta. The competition involves workshops, field trips, and seminars led by professionals and educators throughout the annual three-day provincial event.

"The desired outcome from the competition is to develop knowledgeable, skilled, and dedicated citizens who are enabled to solve complex environmental issues, act as stewards of the environment, and have a desire to learn more about the environment and natural resources management," says Chantelle Bambrick on behalf of the Alberta Envirothon Association.



Field test stations for Forestry, Wildlife, and Soils and Land Use, at the 2024 Alberta Envirothon in Vermilion, AB



Students explore the colourful world of soil through art.

FRIAA became an event sponsor for the Alberta Envirothon through **FRIP** in 2023, providing funding to support a communications and promotions specialist as well as competition activities. "FRIAA's support has allowed the AEA to grow in recent years and attract new organizations to join the collaborative initiative." Continues Bambrick: "By not having to dedicate time and resources to fundraising, the board has been able to focus its efforts on delivering a successful competition."

Canadian Forest Products Ltd., Foothills Forest Products Inc., West Fraser Mills, and Weyerhaeuser provided FRIP funding for Alberta to host the 2025 National Conservation Foundation (NCF)-Envirothon. The NCF-Envirothon is a six-day international competition with over 500 participants from the United States, Canada, Singapore, and China. "This significant milestone provides an exceptional opportunity to showcase Alberta on the international stage and strengthen our province's involvement in the global competition," Chantelle says.

The 2025 NCF-Envirothon will be held from July 20–26, 2025, at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta. During the competition, teams will learn about forest sustainability and resilience in Alberta. The capstone scenario will focus on addressing vulnerabilities to Alberta's forest health that are anticipated from a changing climate.

Chantelle noted, "We have received feedback from numerous teachers highlighting the lasting impact Envirothon has had on their students. Participants have gained valuable insights into a wide range of career opportunities, enhanced their public speaking skills, and built meaningful connections and friendships through the competition. Many teachers have reported that former students have pursued related fields in post-secondary education and on to careers in environmental or natural resource sectors."





# Native Trout Habitat Recovery with Trout Unlimited Canada

Rehabilitation team pose for photo on completed beaver dam analogue (BDA).

The Waiparous Creek watershed is located along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains in Alberta. Along with being an important source watershed for communities including Cochrane and Calgary, the watershed also contains habitat for the Bull Trout and the Westslope Cutthroat Trout and is within a provincial priority area for native trout recovery.

Trout Unlimited Canada identified several restoration opportunities in the fall of 2021. “These opportunities were identified through a mixture of in-person visits, suggestions by project partners, and a comprehensive watershed assessment by AJM Environmental,” says Elliot Lindsay, an implementation biologist with Trout Unlimited Canada. “The assessment identified many restoration opportunities in the Ghost River, Waiparous Creek, and Burnt Timber Creek watersheds.”

Through their excellent working relationship with the Ghost Watershed Alliance Society, Trout Unlimited Canada was able to build relationships with local volunteers, stakeholders, and land manager contacts to develop and implement habitat rehabilitation projects in the Ghost River Public Land Use Zone.

**FRIP** supported this habitat restoration project with funding from Spray Lakes Sawmills.

“Overall, rehabilitation measures have been successful,” continues Elliot, “with native vegetation returning to sites previously consisting of compacted bare soils, fish returning to areas above previously impassable culverts, and beavers returning to beaver dam analogue areas (BDAs) on an unnamed tributary of Waiparous Creek.”

While this FRIP project is part of a broader effort for habitat recovery in the area, it will contribute to the overall resilience of stream habitats within the watershed. “FRIAA support was critical in ensuring the project had enough funding to proceed with the culvert replacement and construction of BDAs,” Elliot explains. “These habitat rehabilitation sites will help reduce the overall pressures being faced by Bull Trout and Westslope Cutthroat Trout, both federally listed as ‘threatened’ under the Species at Risk Act, as well as other native fishes.” Trout Unlimited Canada will continue to work on initiatives to recover habitat across Alberta’s eastern slopes, which will be needed to prevent species such as the Bull Trout from becoming extinct.



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# NAIT Kidney Lake Field School Upgrades

Since 1974, Kidney Lake Forest Field camp has been an integral part of NAIT's Forest Technology diploma program. Every year, approximately 50 first-year students spend five weeks gaining practical forestry experience in an immersive environment. At the camp, students learn about plant identification, forest measurements, wilderness survival skills, and how to operate wildfire suppression equipment while working as a team and building connections with their classmates.

NAIT performs annual camp maintenance; however, extensive upgrades were needed due to age and deterioration. The Kidney Lake Field School Upgrades project began on June 2, 2023, and is expected to finish in 2025. The project was sponsored by West Fraser Mills Ltd., through **FRIP**.

Student cabins, classroom buildings, and common spaces were upgraded as part of the project. The new buildings have been designed with a FireSmart perspective in mind, using metal roofs and walls to help protect the

structures against possible wildfire threats. Additionally, these new buildings will require less overall maintenance.

Prior to the upgrades, students lived completely off-grid in shared rustic cabins, using lanterns for light and chopping wood for heat in the wood stoves. Upgrades include power and water systems, windows, insulation, fencing, and a remote monitoring system. Future students will now have power, heat, and cooling inside the camp buildings. The site will have the potential to be utilized year-round, increasing outside educational possibilities.

One of the biggest changes is the shift from shared accommodations. "From a diversity, equity, and inclusion perspective, all students will now have individual rooms within the new dorms," says NAIT'S Trevor April, associate dean, energy. The new camp will provide a comfortable, modern, and safe place to learn, setting students up to eventually graduate and obtain a rewarding career in forestry.

Camp upgrades before (left two photos) and after (right two photos).





White Spruce (*Picea glauca*) seedling in  
a Wildfire Reclamation Program (WRP)  
cutblock near Sundre, AB



# Program Funding Awards



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## Community Fireguard Program (CFP)

In August 2024, the CFP announced a new request for proposals (RFP) for 'Phase 1: Planning.' Seven proposals were approved for funding in October:

- Kananaskis Improvement District
- Town of Hinton
- Little Red River Cree Nation
- Beaver First Nation
- Kikino Metis Settlement
- Tsuut'ina Nation
- Bigstone Cree Nation

In August 2024, the CFP announced an RFP for 'Phase 2: Construction' for projects that could initiate construction in the fall of 2024. Three projects were approved for funding in October, including the **Town of Canmore**, the **Town of Whitecourt**, and the **Town of Swan Hills**.

In November 2024, the CFP invited proponents currently developing projects under 'Phase 1: Planning' to submit proposals under 'Phase 2: Construction' for projects that could be constructed by March 31, 2025. Two proposals were approved for funding in January 2025, including the **Town of Canmore** and the **Town of Hinton**.

In February 2025, FRIAA announced a new proposal intake for 'Phase 2: Construction' projects for proponents currently developing projects under 'Phase 1: Planning.' Proposals will be reviewed as received until the available funds are committed to projects.

## FRIAA FireSmart Program

The June 2024 FRIAA FireSmart request for expressions of interest (RFEOI) and RFP received 56 applications, asking for a total of \$6,039,595. In October 2024 and January 2025, the Review Committee approved 38 projects for a total of \$3,812,269.

Approved projects include:

- 4 for FireSmart planning
- 10 for public education
- 2 for inter-agency co-operation
- 1 for legislation
- 1 for development and
- 20 for vegetation/fuel management.

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Below are a few project examples:

## **Parkland County Wildfire Mitigation Strategy**

*(Parkland County)*

**Discipline:** Planning

**Term:** January 2025 to December 2025

**Objective:** Develop a Wildfire Mitigation Strategy for the county, with a higher level of detail for its seven hamlets and five summer villages. This will provide the county with actionable recommendations to reduce the threat of wildfire to life and property, and develop priorities for future FireSmart implementation projects.

## **Fort MacKay First Nation FireSmart Home Assessments and Public Education Initiatives**

*(Fort MacKay First Nation)*

**Discipline:** Public education

**Term:** January 2025 to December 2025

**Objective:** Conduct 310 FireSmart home assessments within the Fort MacKay First Nation that will provide community members with actionable recommendations to protect their properties from future wildfire threats.

## **Sucker Creek First Nation – Vegetation Management 2024–25**

*(Sucker Creek First Nation)*

**Discipline:** Vegetation management

**Term:** January 2025 to December 2025

**Objective:** Complete vegetation treatment for priority areas identified through the Wildfire Mitigation Strategy for Sucker Creek First Nation. Treatments consist of thinning/pruning, removing dead and down trees, and disposing of debris on 10.1 hectares.



Sunchild  
First Nation  
Vegetation  
Management  
Treatment  
(thinning/  
mulching for  
fuel removal)





Beaver lodge  
at the Town of  
Hinton Beaver  
Boardwalk, a  
FRIP funded  
project





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