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# BRANCHING OUT

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JUNE 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:  
Mushrooms in Whitecourt, AB

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Sunrise over wildfire-  
impacted forest near  
Manning, AB

# President's Message



As we welcome the warmth and vibrancy of summer, we are excited to gather again for the FRIAA Annual General Meeting (AGM) scheduled for June 18<sup>th</sup>. While the annual report will be shared at the AGM, a few notable highlights include the closure of the Mountain Pine Beetle Forest Rehabilitation Program (MPBFRP). In just over a decade, the MPBFRP provided over \$11 million in funding to rehabilitate forest stands damaged by the mountain pine beetle.

Program expenditures in the Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP) marked another highlight and record, at a high of \$54 million. The multi-year project commitments made under FRIP will support activities to enhance Alberta's forests now and into the future. Finally, FRIAA FireSmart has approved nearly 600 projects since program inception that help protect Alberta's people, infrastructure, and environment, with almost \$60 million in project payments and commitments. You will be able to read the full annual report, which will be posted on the FRIAA website, following the AGM.

In this edition of *Branching Out*, we highlight efforts made in several of FRIAA's programs, including the educational opportunities provided by the Lesser Slave Lake Watershed Council through FRIP. Our second story features the fireguard construction in the Bow Valley, with funding support through the Community Fireguard Program. The importance of the protection of seed orchards through the Mountain Pine Beetle Program is discussed in our third story. The final feature story provides a brief update on the Enhanced Reforestation of Legacy Disturbances program since its inception in 2019.

We look forward to engaging with our members and stakeholders at the AGM, celebrating our successes, and charting the course for the months ahead. As always, we welcome your feedback and invite you to connect with us via [admin@friaa.ab.ca](mailto:admin@friaa.ab.ca).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. Briand". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Richard Briand**  
President, FRIAA

# Project Stories

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Flowing stream  
in Alberta



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# Building Capacity to Promote and Inspire Watershed Stewardship

The Lesser Slave Lake Watershed Council (LSWC) is one of Alberta's eleven Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils. As a non-profit, charitable organization governed by a volunteer board of directors, the LSWC is dedicated to raising environmental literacy through engaging programs, activities, and events that promote watershed stewardship.

Through the **Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP)** sponsorship, Vanderwell Contractors (1971) Ltd., Tolko Industries Ltd., and West Fraser Mills Ltd. have provided crucial funding to support and build capacity for the X-Stream Science program across the watershed. "Funding can be difficult to secure,

and the FRIP funds really make a difference," says Meghan Payne, executive director of LSWC.

X-Stream Science is a hands-on program that offers students the opportunity to collect biological, chemical, and physical data during field trips. This data is then analyzed and stored for monitoring and comparison over time, helping students and decision-makers make informed choices to protect our watersheds. The program not only inspires young minds but also teaches valuable skills in a fun and dynamic environment. Meghan Payne elaborates: "Although one day was completely rained out, the children still had fun!"



Students learning about aquatics with the LSWC

# Bow Valley Fireguard Planning and Construction

If you have visited Canmore recently, you may have noticed some changes to the surrounding landscape. The Town of Canmore, in collaboration with the Municipal District of Bighorn and the Kananaskis Improvement District, has embarked upon a significant project aimed at mitigating the threat of wildfire to the residents and communities of the Bow Valley. Through the **Community Fireguard Program**, the Town of Canmore was able to access funds for planning and construction of The Bow Valley Fireguard.

The fireguard planning project commenced in May 2024 and is ongoing. Vegetation removal plans were completed for the East Park Gates, Harvie Heights, and Stoneworks Creek areas through this planning process. Construction of the first phase is underway with 315 hectares cleared or thinned and debris disposal continuing over the coming months. The next phases of the construction projects are being developed to continue advancing the fuel reduction initiatives in the Bow Corridor.



Loading salvaged logs onto truck



Overlooking Canmore from the new fireguard clearing at Stoneworks Creek

Protecting communities from the threat of wildfire in the Bow Valley has taken significant collaboration and communication between the various jurisdictions and government agencies. Developing stakeholder support through engagement and education has been a key aspect to the success of this project. Mayor Sean Krausert emphasized the importance of this collaborative approach:

"Because wildfires don't know boundaries, collaboration with other communities and agencies has been essential in our mitigation efforts to increase the Bow Valley's resiliency to wildfires. The funding from FRIAA and the collaborative effort of everyone involved in this project has resulted in something far greater than any of us could have achieved alone."



Felling trees for the fireguard near Canmore, AB, at Stoneworks Creek



Walking through HASOC Lodgepole Pine Orchard, Verbenone pheromone pouch placed on trunk of tree

# Protecting Seed Orchards from the Mountain Pine Beetle

The mountain pine beetle (MPB) is a destructive tree pest that can become problematic when their populations grow to epidemic proportions. MPB can severely damage Alberta's forests by attacking and killing pine species, such as lodgepole or jack pine. The **Mountain Pine Beetle Program (MPBP)** was established in 2007 in response to the MPB invasion during the summer of 2006. Since that time the program has provided funding to detect, control, and mitigate the spread of MPB.

Established in 1986, the Huallen Seed Orchard Company (HASOC) has become crucial for Alberta's reforestation efforts. FRIAA has

supported the protection of the orchards since inception of the MPBP. Currently FRIAA is funding the detection and prevention of the MPB at the HASOC lodgepole pine orchards and at the HASOC Lodgepole Pine Genetic Field Trials, which are an integral part of the Alberta Tree Improvement Program.

The decline of the beetle population has been noted across the province, and has not gone unnoticed at the orchards, with fewer beetles being caught in control traps each year. When asked about the beetles being trapped, Project Manager Charlotte Ratcliff says, "They're really a lot fewer instances than there used to be."

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The projects involve detection of the MPB through the use of Lindgren funnel traps located upwind of the orchard site, and prevention through the use of Verbenone pheromones packages at the sites to discourage the attack on these valuable trees. "It's a pretty cut-and-dried project. The contractor goes out and staples Verbenone packages at the recommended distance and then they check the traps and count the beetles at the recommended interval."

Though the project may seem straightforward, its significance cannot be overstated. Ratcliff says, "Projects like this are very important because the genetic value of all of these trees really impacts the forests in general. About 60% of the deployment on the Alberta landscape is improved trees for spruce, and for pine it's around 30%. The breadth of genetics in these programs really does help the forests for climate change and drought resistance as well as for providing timber values."

Orchard Manager Leslie Proudfoot, checking the Lindgren funnel traps



Spruce seedling, planted as part of EnRLD program near High Level, AB



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# EnRLD Program update

The Enhanced Reforestation of Legacy Disturbances (EnRLD) program plays a significant role in the reforestation of Alberta public lands that have been disturbed by wildfire (or other natural disturbances) that may be slow to regenerate naturally. The program supports reforestation of areas affected by natural disturbances, enhancing forest carbon sequestration to mitigate climate change. The projects involve treating these areas with the following reforestation activities: site assessments, mechanical site preparation, vegetation management, and planting.

The program's objectives have been consistent since establishment in maintaining long-term sustainability and promoting carbon sequestration in disturbed areas that previously would not have had such opportunities.

Since 2019 the program has successfully completed 12 reforestation projects, with over 2,447,835 seedlings planted on 1,597 ha. FRIAA's grant recipients play a crucial role in the success of this program through their reforestation knowledge, experience, and dedicated efforts in planning and executing reforestation activities.

Currently, Carson Integrated is managing two active projects in the High Level and Manning forest areas. Lorne Carson, founder and president of Carson Integrated Ltd., when asked about the benefits of the EnRLD program, says: "Carson Integrated has been working for FRIAA and Alberta on the EnRLD program since its inception. Alberta and FRIAA have developed an excellent program that enhances the long-term fibre supply while also offsetting carbon outputs. We are proud to be a part of it."



Burned logs decked for community firewood



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