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# BRANCHING OUT

MARCH 2026

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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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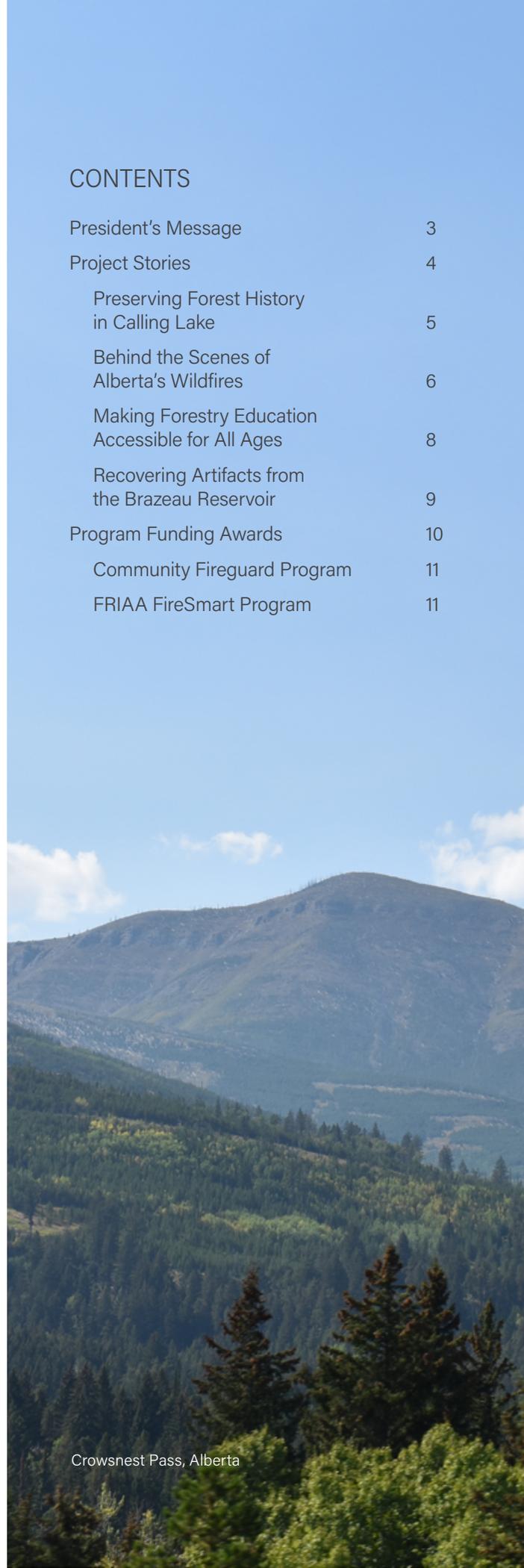
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Cover photo:  
Wood Bison (*Bison bison athabasca*) near Zama City, Alberta

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Crowsnest Pass, Alberta

# President's Message



As winter gives way to longer days across Alberta, I would like to extend a warm greeting on behalf of the FRIAA Board of Directors. I'm pleased to share another edition of *Branching Out* that highlights the many ways forest values extend beyond the timber resource. By bringing together communities, industry, educators, and researchers, we can work together to strengthen our understanding and stewardship of Alberta's forest resources.

In Calling Lake, community members are preserving forest history through storytelling, artifacts, and shared cultural knowledge, ensuring that local forest legacies are carried forward for future generations. This issue also takes readers behind the scenes of Alberta's recent wildfire experience. *The Wildfire! From the Ground Up* documentary series offers a powerful and thoughtful look at wildfire impacts, response, and recovery, while highlighting the people on the ground. Elsewhere, the Forestry Futures Alliance continues to make forestry education accessible to students across Alberta. Our last story features the archaeological work at the Brazeau Reservoir, reminding us that forests are also places of deep history and long-standing human connection, with projects that respectfully integrate traditional knowledge and scientific research.

Within these pages we have included the most recent update for funding awards within the Community Fireguard and FRIAA FireSmart programs. The planning, education, and construction work underway across the province reflects a shared commitment to reducing wildfire risk to local communities.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, thank you to all proponents, partners, and contributors whose dedication makes this work possible. Together we are strengthening Alberta's forests today while building knowledge and resilience for the future. 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 that reads "R. Briand". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

**Richard Briand**  
President, FRIAA

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# Project Stories

Trembling  
aspen (*Populus  
tremuloides*)

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# Preserving Forest History in Calling Lake

The Calling Lake Community Society is undertaking a remarkable forest history project, *The Understory: Celebrating Calling Lake's Place in Northern Forest History*. With support from Vanderwell Contractors (1971) Ltd. through the **Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP)**, the project is gathering, preserving, and sharing the stories of how forests have shaped the region's culture, economy, and way of life.

Community leaders Wilf Brooks and Kathy Stubbs have been at the forefront, drawing on decades of local knowledge and a deep connection to the area. They have led an effort to collect photographs, artifacts, and oral histories from Indigenous Elders, multi-generational residents, and settler families in the Calling Lake area.

From restoring an old voyageur canoe to hosting sport heritage celebrations, open houses, and historical feasts, the project has used creative, community-driven approaches to connect with residents and bring local history to life. One of the project's centrepieces is the development of their website filled with curated stories and images and complemented by new displays at the Calling Lake Historical Centre.

"Without this effort, much of our shared history could have been lost," said Wilf Brooks. "We're ensuring it's not only preserved but shared in ways that future generations can explore, learn from, and build upon."

While originally envisioned as a three-year project, it has grown into a five-year vision focused on sustainability, educational outreach, and long-term stewardship. The team has created a strong foundation by involving professional writers, archivists, and a graphic designer from the outset—a decision both Brooks and Stubbs credit as key to the project's success.

The initiative underscores how FRIP can support grassroots efforts that enhance public understanding of Alberta's forest legacy. By weaving together personal stories, historical data, and cultural traditions, this Calling Lake project is a model of how communities can take ownership of their forest history and pass it forward.

Captions L-R Ellefson Mill, historic photo; Calling Lake Historical Centre; community leaders Wilf Brooks and Kathy Stubbs at the historical centre





# Behind the Scenes of Alberta's Wildfires

Preparing the clapperboard on location of the documentary *Wildfire from the Ground Up!*

The 2023 wildfire season was one of the most significant Alberta has experienced in recent history. Clyde Corser, project manager and executive producer of *Wildfire! From The Ground Up*, explained that the wildfires in 2023 inspired him to create a documentary examining the impacts of wildfire, not only on the forest landscape but on the communities, values, and people affected. What started out as a small scoping project for one documentary has expanded into a multi-part series with four episodes now available on the project's website ([albertawildfire.com](http://albertawildfire.com)). This education project is funded through the **Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP)**, with sponsorship from Foothills Forest Products Inc., Vanderwell Contractors (1971) Ltd., Tall Pine Timber Co. Ltd., Tolko Industries Ltd., Canadian Forest Products Ltd., and several small community loggers including Corser.

The series explores a range of topics including wildfire ignition, effects on forest values, the roles involved in wildfire response, and how communities navigate the aftermath. The latest episode, **Evacuation: Making the Call**, offers a compelling look at the challenging decisions facing leaders and first responders during evacuation events. Corser says, "It's important to highlight the individuals on the ground, the ones making those hard calls during an emergency. We wanted to recognize everyone involved, especially those who aren't usually in the spotlight."

Education and awareness remain central to the project's mission. Corser notes that even with his background as a forester, the process has been eye-opening. "In the Forest Values episode, we spoke with experts including a mycologist, who studies the mycorrhizal fungi,

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and an archaeologist to learn how wildfire affects these different types of values.”

Looking ahead, the documentary team hopes to produce four additional episodes. One of the biggest challenges is capturing footage from the front lines, says Corser. “We are still working on getting more footage. We would love to be able to film and/or interview the front-lines people who are on the ground fighting the fire.”

The series has already resonated strongly with viewers and continues to reach new audiences. Among the most meaningful feedback Corser received came from a younger viewer: “My granddaughter says the episodes are fascinating and NOT boring! I’m glad these documentaries are able to reach the younger generation, and it’s important to get this information out there to as many people as possible.”



Crew moving equipment on location of recent wildfire



Behind the scenes of *Wildfire from the Ground Up!*



Students learning about tree planting during Work Wild field programming

# Making Forestry Education Accessible for All Ages

In 2017, three prominent non-profit educational groups in Alberta came together to establish the Forestry Futures Alliance (FFA): CAREERS, Work Wild, and Inside Education. By working together within the FFA, these organizations have been able to deliver a series of programs aimed at inspiring the next generation of forestry professionals and environmental stewards.

With support from the **Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP)**, the Forestry Futures Alliance has created numerous educational programs for young students spanning from kindergarten to grade 12. Sustainable forest management, forest ecology, and careers in forestry are just a few of the topics covered during classroom discussions. Additionally, the FFA works to deliver hands-on education through field trips, workshops, and youth summits.

Forrest Battjes, a forestry educator with Work Wild, spends time delivering the programming in classrooms and through hands-on workshops. Students are often very engaged during classroom discussions and will ask tough questions about forestry, providing forest educators with opportunities to share their

experiences and have engaging conversations around the regulatory framework that promotes sustainability.

Battjes says:

One program that sticks out to me is the *Regenerate Forest and Wildlife Youth Summit*. Inside Education holds youth summits, and in 2023 they had a summit with about 20 schools that each put together a team of students to come out and learn about forest ecology and forestry careers, do hands-on workshops, and hear from forestry professionals.

Since the establishment of the FFA, the three groups (CAREERS, Work Wild, and Inside Education) have been able to reach thousands of students and teachers across the province, and each year the numbers are growing. Battjes explains that connecting with teachers is a huge part of delivering forest education, as they help to share the knowledge with the students. "One of the best things about being an educator is that after the class discussions students will come up and say, 'I'm curious about this' or 'I didn't know this before' and continue to talk with the educators", says Battjes.

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# Recovering Artifacts from the Brazeau Reservoir

With support from Weyerhaeuser Company Limited through the **Forest Resource Improvement Program (FRIP)**, Ember Archaeology partnered with several First Nation communities to carry out archaeological research at the Brazeau Reservoir. The Brazeau Reservoir is an area of high archaeological interest, with evidence of human use in the region dating back more than 12,000 years. This work has contributed to a better understanding of historic land use in and around the Brazeau River.

The project is multi-faceted, with the aim of improving the inventory of non-timber forest resources while providing archaeological training to local First Nation participants and integrating traditional knowledge into the understanding of the archaeological sites. Incorporating traditional knowledge into forestry best practices and fostering relationships between communities and industry is integral to maintaining sustainability of our lands. Courtney Lakevold, project archaeologist, notes, "A project like this contributes to our knowledge of traditional land use which, going forward, can help all parties manage historic resources more effectively."

Approximately 1,500 artifacts were recovered during the project. Among the most notable finds were two projectile points estimated to be more than 2,000 years old. Protein residue analysis showed that one point had been used to hunt bison, while the other was used on a bear. Lakevold elaborated: "These points were discovered by community members, and it was wonderful to see how excited the participants were to discover these. It was very valuable having community members on the project as they offered a lot of ideas and insights on how artifacts may have been used and what the objects mean to them."

Reflecting on the project, Lakevold says, "These types of projects are very rewarding because the learning goes both ways, and we have the opportunity to learn from community members, see a different point of view, or think of things in a different way." Projects like this contribute to a growing body of knowledge that can support more effective management of historic and cultural resources. By combining scientific methods, community participation, and traditional knowledge, the Brazeau Reservoir project provides valuable insights that will help inform future land and resource management decisions.

Ember Archaeology and community members working together to uncover history



# Program Funding Awards

White spruce  
(*Picea glauca*)  
near Fox Creek,  
Alberta

## Community Fireguard Program

In October 2025, a project was awarded to **Kikino Metis Settlement** for Phase 2: Construction.

In December 2025, a project was awarded to **Loon River First Nation** for Phase 1: Planning.

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# FRIAA FireSmart Program

The July 2025 FRIAA FireSmart request for expressions of interest (RFEOI) received 48 applications, asking for a total of \$4,867,280. In October 2025 and January 2026 the review committee approved 30 proposals for \$2,993,958.

Approved projects include:

- 7 for FireSmart planning
- 6 for public education
- 17 for vegetation/fuel management

Below are a few FRIAA FireSmart project examples:

## Mountain View County Wildfire Mitigation Strategy

*(Mountain View County)*

**FireSmart Discipline:** FireSmart planning

**Term:** January 2026 to July 2026

**Objective:** Develop a wildfire mitigation strategy plan for Mountain View County. This plan will identify wildfire hazards, assess risk exposure, and outline prioritized mitigation actions. It will serve as a decision-support tool for municipal staff, fire services, and local stakeholders, aiming to reduce wildfire risk to people, property, and critical infrastructure.

## Sucker Creek FN Vegetation Management 2025–26

*(Sucker Creek First Nation)*

**FireSmart Discipline:** Vegetation management

**Term:** January 2026 to March 2026

**Objective:** Complete treatments consisting of thinning/pruning, removing dead and down trees, and disposing of debris on 7.2 hectares.

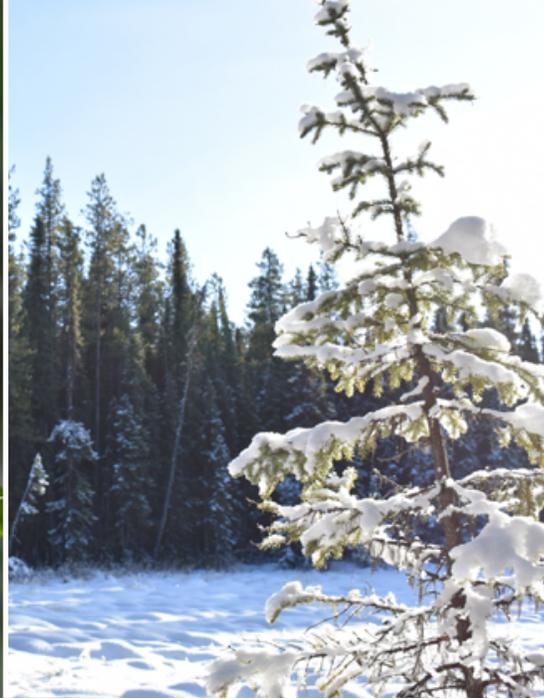
## Rocky View County 2026 Branch Collection Project

*(Rocky View County)*

**FireSmart Discipline:** Public education

**Term:** May 2026 to October 2026

**Objective:** Provide residents of the Greater Bragg Creek community, Elbow Valley, and Spring Hill areas access to FireSmart education, along with branch and debris collection locations, to assist with the removal of wildfire fuel load.



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