
BRANCHING OUT

JUNE 2026



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 resources sustainably. Editorial material may be reproduced with credit: "Courtesy of Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta."



Board of Directors

Richard Briand, President
Allan Bell, First Vice-President
Andy Neigel, Second Vice-President
David Wall, Treasurer
Daniel Lux, Director
M.J. Munn-Kristoff, Director
Wendy Crosina, Director

Follow us on:

 Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta

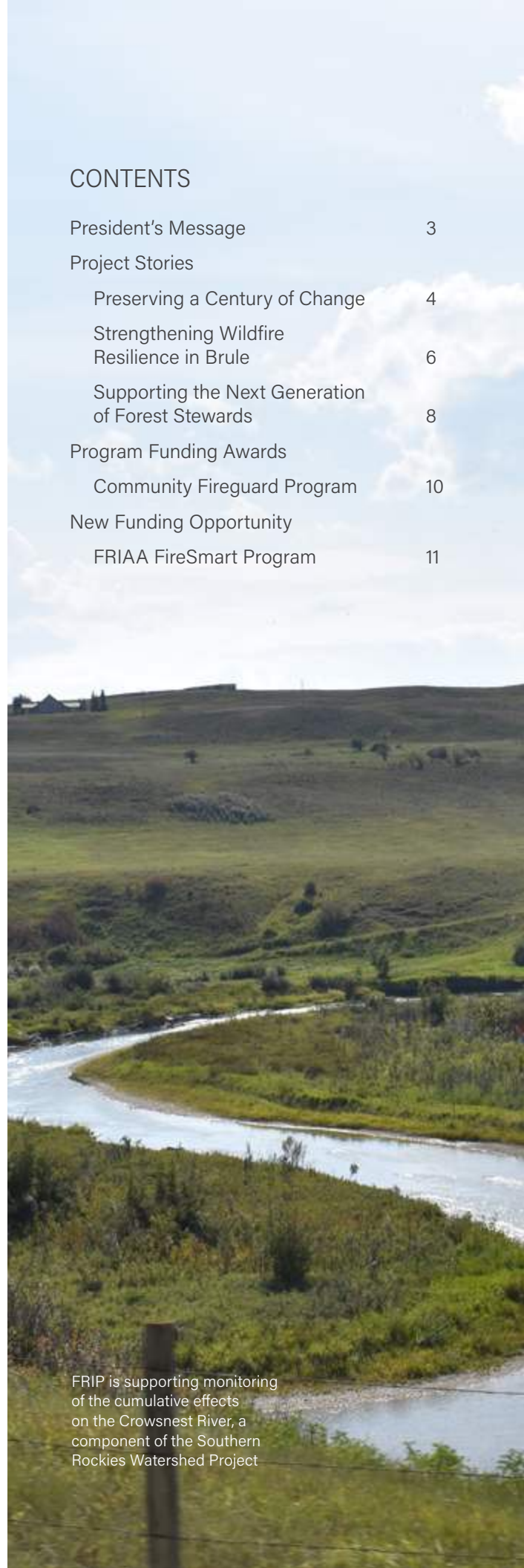
To submit proposals, amendments, progress and final reports, payment requests, deliverables, and program documents, visit friaa.ab.ca/program-submissions.

Sign up for newsletters, funding announcements, and more at friaa.ab.ca.

Cover photo:
Bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*)

CONTENTS

President's Message	3
Project Stories	
Preserving a Century of Change	4
Strengthening Wildfire Resilience in Brule	6
Supporting the Next Generation of Forest Stewards	8
Program Funding Awards	
Community Fireguard Program	10
New Funding Opportunity	
FRIAA FireSmart Program	11



FRIP is supporting monitoring of the cumulative effects on the Crownsnest River, a component of the Southern Rockies Watershed Project

President's Message



Greetings on behalf of the Board of Directors. As some of you may be aware, this has been an active year for FRIAA. For the first time in several years, we reintroduced the Forest Resource Improvement Program Funding Initiatives, commonly known as Open Funds. The response has been extremely positive, reflecting the strong interest and commitment to improving Alberta's forest resources. On behalf of FRIAA, I would like to extend a sincere thank you to everyone who submitted expressions of interest and look forward to seeing the great projects that will emerge from this process.

In this issue of *Branching Out*, we share the Mountain Legacy Project's efforts to digitize historic photographs that provide critical insight into long-term landscape change. We also highlight wildfire mitigation work in Brule, where vegetation management is helping reduce the threat of wildfire to an at-risk community. Finally, we share how support for the Alberta Junior Forest Wardens Association is helping youth and families build skills, confidence, and lasting connections to Alberta's forests.

We are pleased to share recent funding awards through the Community Fireguard Program, along with a new funding opportunity through the FRIAA FireSmart Program.

Thank you to everyone who contributes to this work. By working together, we continue to enhance the forest resource to benefit all Albertans. As always, we welcome your feedback and invite you to connect with us via admin@friaa.ab.ca.

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

Richard Briand
President, FRIAA



Preserving a Century of Change

Digitizing historic images to understand Alberta's mountain landscapes

View from Mt.
Maccarib, taken
by Morrison
Parsons
Bridgland in
1915

High in the Canadian Rockies, early surveyors carried heavy camera equipment to remote peaks, capturing detailed photographs of Alberta's landscapes more than a century ago. Today, those images are helping researchers understand how forests and ecosystems change over time.

Through the **Forest Resource Improvement Program**, with sponsorship from Canadian Forest Products Ltd., West Fraser Alberta Wood Products Ltd., and Weyerhaeuser Company Limited, the Mountain Legacy Project is digitizing more than 13,000 fragile glass plate negatives. Some images date back to the late 1800s and show mountain landscapes before significant development and resource activity.

Led by Dr. Eric Higgs of the University of Victoria, the project builds on one of Canada's most unique historical datasets. The original

photographs were taken during mapping surveys conducted between 1888 and 1958, when photographs were used to create highly accurate topographic maps across Western Canada.

"It was the only project of its kind at that scale in the world that used photographs to create the maps," says Higgs.

While the images have long existed, their physical format limited access and analysis. Digitization now allows researchers to scan the images at high resolution and apply modern tools. This makes it possible to reconstruct historical landscapes and study long-term change in vegetation, disturbance patterns, and climate-related impacts.

For industry partners, preserving this record is critical. As Doug Turner of West Fraser notes, protecting the original images ensures their availability for future use. Just as important, the photographs provide a baseline that shows what landscapes looked like before many modern pressures existed, which can provide insights into long-term management decisions.

By connecting past and present landscapes, the Mountain Legacy Project is creating new opportunities for research and informed forest management. A century-old record is now helping guide decisions about Alberta's forests today and into the future.

The Mountain Legacy Project is available online at mountainlegacy.ca.



Bighorn Coal Basin, taken by George Stewart Malloch in 1908

■ Why historic baselines matter

Historic images provide a reference point. When today's landscapes are compared with older photographs, researchers can see patterns that are easy to miss year to year—such as shifts in vegetation, and disturbance footprints.



Thin and mulch treatment under mixedwood forest

Strengthening Wildfire Resilience in Brule

Vegetation management aims to lower wildfire risk in Yellowhead County

Brule is a small hamlet at the end of a single access road in Yellowhead County. Located near Jasper National Park and Rock Lake–Solomon Creek Wildland Park, the community is at-risk of wildfire due to its isolation, surrounding forest, and limited evacuation routes.

Through the **FRIAA FireSmart Program**, Yellowhead County completed a vegetation management project with hopes to lower wildfire risk near homes and critical infrastructure. The project focused on approximately 12 hectares of forest directly adjacent to Brule’s residential area.

The work included two metres of hand-pruning conifer trees, removing small-diameter conifer regeneration, and mechanically mulching surface fuels. Deciduous trees and larger conifers were retained to preserve wind protection and the area’s natural character.

“We’ve done a lot of FireSmart work in Yellowhead County,” says Albert Bahri, Manager of Protective Services. “Where the FireSmarting has been done, it works—and it’s proving that it works.”

The County continues to focus on long-term maintenance. Treated areas are assessed on a five-year cycle to manage regrowth and maintain effectiveness.

Bahri emphasizes that community-wide mitigation must be paired with action at the property level. "We can do vegetation management around a community, but embers will still fall," he says. "If properties aren't FireSmarted, a fire can ignite from within the community."

The Brule project reflects a broader commitment to wildfire resilience. By completing this phase of its mitigation strategy, Yellowhead County is helping protect homes, livelihoods, and a community rooted in the boreal forest.

■ **What the work included:**

- Two metres of pruning on conifer stems
- Removing small-diameter conifer regeneration
- Mechanically mulching surface fuels
- Retaining some spaced deciduous trees and larger conifers for wind protection



Two metres of pruning on conifer stems to remove ladder fuels



Supporting the Next Generation of Forest Stewards

Voyageur canoe excursion on Twin Lakes during the Junior Forest Wardens National Camp

How Alberta Junior Forest Wardens build skills, confidence, and connection

For nearly 90 years, the Alberta Junior Forest Wardens Association (AJFWA) has helped young Albertans build outdoor skills, confidence, and a lifelong connection to the province's forests.

AJFWA is expanding programming across Alberta with support from the **Forest Resource Improvement Program**, with sponsorship from several forest companies including ANC Timber

Ltd., Canadian Forest Products Ltd., Millar Western Forest Products Ltd., Tolko Industries Ltd., Vanderwell Contractors (1971) Ltd., and West Fraser Alberta Wood Products Ltd. The multi-year initiative focuses on reducing barriers to participation and strengthening volunteer capacity.

"This organization gives kids and families opportunities they wouldn't normally have," says Tim Watts, President of the AJFWA.



Fall workshop with hands on learning in forestry

Today, AJFWA now reaches more than 1,900 members across 35 divisions. Youth participate in hands-on learning focused on forestry, ecology, wildfire prevention, and outdoor safety.

The program emphasizes practical skill development alongside values-based learning, helping participants build confidence and independence. For many Junior Forest Wardens, it also serves as an introduction to forestry and environmental sciences, inspiring future career paths while equipping others to become leaders within their communities.

“We’re not just training kids—we’re helping develop confident, capable adults,” says Watts.

Beyond skills and knowledge, the program fosters a strong sense of community. Youth and families build lasting relationships through shared experiences, with many alumni remaining engaged long after their time in the program. This sense of belonging continues to strengthen the organization’s volunteer base and supports its long-term sustainability.

Together, these efforts demonstrate how hands-on education, community engagement, and targeted support can create lasting benefits for youth, families, and communities across Alberta.

Learn more or get involved at ajfwa.ca.

Program Funding Awards

Community Fireguard Program

In February 2026, the Community Fireguard Program announced a new Request for Proposals inviting wildfire planning consultants to develop operational plans for the following communities: County of Grande Prairie, Peerless Trout First Nation, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, Rocky View County, and the Town of Edson.

In April 2026, the FRIAA Board approved five proposals under the Community Fireguard Program, awarding a total of up to \$384,759.

Project grant funding has been awarded to the following consultants for the designated communities:

- Carson Integrated Ltd. (Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo)
- GeoVerra Inc. (Rocky View County)
- Mistik Environmental Services Ltd. (Peerless Trout First Nation)
- Plaidcomb Ecology Ltd. (Town of Edson)
- Silvacom (County of Grande Prairie)

Fireguard constructed near Whitecourt, AB under the Community Fireguard Program





White Spruce
(*Picea glauca*)

New Funding Opportunity

FRIAA FireSmart Program

FRIAA is pleased to announce two funding opportunities under the FRIAA FireSmart Program.

Requests for expressions of interest are open for the vegetation management discipline.

Requests for proposals are open for non-vegetation disciplines, including emergency planning, public education, inter-agency co-operation, cross-training, and legislation and development controls.

Submissions are due by 4:00 p.m. on Friday, September 4, 2026, through the FRIAA submissions portal: friaa.ab.ca/program-submissions.

More information about these funding opportunities is available on the FRIAA website: friaa.ab.ca.



FRIAA
BOX 11094, MAIN POST OFFICE
EDMONTON, ALBERTA
T5J 3K4

**TO RECEIVE THESE NEWSLETTERS,
PLEASE CONTACT FRIAA AT:**

PHONE: 780-429-5873
FAX: 780-429-4026
EMAIL: admin@friaa.ab.ca
WEB: friaa.ab.ca

REPRODUCTION CREDIT:

"Courtesy of Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta."

