

The power of strong partnerships fuels the future of the Foothills Model Forest.

“It’s the end of the Foothills Model Forest as we’ve known it for the past 15 years, but we have a great future ahead of us,” says President Jim LeLacheur.

Phase III of the organization wraps up March 31, with the conclusion of the federal model forest program. However, the Foothills Model Forest has secured financial commitment from its partners Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Jasper National Park and West Fraser Mills Ltd. to continue for another five years, from April 1, 2007, to March 31, 2012.

Furthermore, a five-year business strategy for 2007–2012 has been developed, with input from partners and staff, and finalized by the Board of Directors.

The vision for the organization over this next business cycle is: The Foothills Model Forest is a leader in developing innovative science and knowledge for integrated resource management on the forest landscape through diverse and actively engaged partnerships.

“We will keep the core simple, and continue to nurture existing and future partnerships,” says LeLacheur.

The Foothill Model Forest plans to regroup all of its research activities into the following program themes:

- landscape dynamics,
- wildlife,
- water,
- forest communities program (if successful under the federal program),
- data, information and knowledge management.

Don Podlubny, general manager, says the organization will build upon its goals of sustainable forest management, knowledge and technology transfer, communications and outreach, and policy support and influence.

“The model forest is not so much changing its core values as shifting some of its direction,” he says. “We’ve made a lot of advances in research and processes, and while we will continue with the current program, we want to

focus on new areas as well, such as climate change, and water quality and quantity.”

Foothills Model Forest research aims to provide practical results that land and resource managers can apply at ground level. Projects such as grizzly bear habitat mapping, stream crossing assessments and integrated industry access planning answer many questions asked by the partners.

“A major success factor is that our research does not sit on shelves,” says LeLacheur.

In an effort to circulate and apply its processes and tools beyond its geographical boundaries, the Foothills Model Forest will work with a network of like-minded organizations and companies, offering an established infrastructure of GIS, financial, administrative and communication systems.

The structure of the organization will generally remain the same. If resources allow, the organization may add to its human resources to increase the level of services it offers its shareholders and partners.

ABORIGINAL INVOLVEMENT

Four companies – Shell Canada Limited, Suncor Energy Inc., West Fraser Mills Ltd. and Luscar Limited - Coal Valley Mine – are piloting the referral process of the Aboriginal Involvement Program. In some cases, companies estimate that the referral process saves between \$10,000 and \$30,000 per day in planning time. Over 1,200 cultural sites from four Aboriginal communities are identified in a database that drives the model for the referral process. Before incurring the cost of equipment and operators, companies can refer to the model, consult with communities and adjust their plans accordingly.

CARIBOU LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

Far from a static document, the Integrated Industry Access Plan continues to evolve and assist resource companies in reducing their footprint on the habitat of the Little Smoky and A la Peche caribou herds in northwestern Alberta, an area that is approximately 5,000 square kilometers. The Caribou Landscape Management Association re-submitted the plan to the Government of Alberta in September, after it was endorsed in June 2006, proposing to continually update the plan, monitor its effectiveness and develop a reclamation plan. “This plan allows companies in the project area to reduce their footprint by up to half of what would typically occur in an area that is fully developed with unconstrained access,” says Wayne Thorp, the association’s director.

ADAPTIVE FOREST MANAGEMENT PROGRAM – A HARD ROAD TO TRAVEL

The long-awaited second book from the Adaptive Forest Management/ History program is now available from the Foothills Model Forest. With over 250 photos and 27 maps it is a fascinating insight into the history of the Upper Athabasca Region and its landscapes, forests and early visitors and settlers who made it what it is today. In so doing, it also describes early attempts to bring forest regulation into effect and the role of the Dominion Forestry Branch and the early Alberta Forest Service. Jasper National Park Superintendent Ron Hooper calls it “impressive and highly readable”. For more information or to purchase a copy of the book contact Fran Hanington at 780-865-8330 or email fran.hanington@gov.ab.ca.

Stream Crossing Program bringing stakeholders together

Resource companies and other partners in the Foothills Stream Crossing Program seek better ways to care for their stream crossings, and the watershed, while reducing costs.

“Although we inspect individual crossings, we are really taking a broader approach to assessing the impact of these crossings on the watershed,” said Jerry Bauer, program coordinator. “Since the program involves a number of companies from the forestry and energy sectors and has the support of both the provincial and federal government, this is true integration at the ground level.”

Last summer, two technicians, hired and trained through the program, assessed the condition of stream crossings for:

- employee and public safety,
- sedimentation,
- the impact on water quality and fish passage.

Based on assessment, the technicians made recommendations for maintenance, repair and replacement.

“This inspection process provides us with the ability to rank crossings based on their condition and the impact they are having on water quality and fish passage,” said Bauer. “By ranking sites, we can target the most critical areas and spend money in a way that provides the most benefits for the entire watershed, such as fixing a culvert that is blocking fish passage to kilometers of habitat.”

The program is driven by agreed-to protocols that will help oil and gas and forest companies manage their stream crossings for the long term. Through this cross-sector initiative, companies share the cost of developing the inspection protocols, planning

and completing the initial inspections. Future cost sharing could include the planning and completion of actual remediation work.

“Through this program, we are able to not only identify but also prioritize and respond to stream crossing issues across the landscape in a coordinated and integrated fashion,” said Rob Staniland, environmental biologist with Talisman Energy Inc.

He said that the major benefit of having everyone on the landscape involved in the program is that all of the crossings are available for monitoring and remediation. “In the past, we would fix our crossing but wouldn’t be able to see what the value of that work was at the watershed level,” said Staniland. “Now, we can target several crossings with the entire watershed in mind.”

Many stream crossing owners in the area have been keen to work together on the program and see the value of being involved long-term, said Chris Spytz, who co-chairs the steering committee and is senior biologist at West Fraser Mills Ltd., Hinton Wood Products.

“This isn’t something where all the issues will be fixed overnight,” he said. “But as a multi-industry approach to a resource management challenge on a large landscape, this is a success story so far.”

There are more than 2,300 crossings (bridges and culverts) on permanent streams within the program area, which encompasses the Foothills Model Forest land base, excluding Jasper National Park and Willmore Wilderness Park.

Established in 2005 by the Foothills Model Forest, the program now has nine voting members (crossing owners, such as industry and government), and seven non-voting members (technical advisors, regulators).

Work to date has included completion and review of the Stream Crossing Assessment Report, and development of initial stream crossing protocols and a stream crossing inspection manual. More than 300 crossings were inspected in the summer of 2006 and the data is now being summarized and will be presented to the owners this winter.

In 2007, staff will fine tune the inspection protocols and manual, look at recruiting new members, develop a work plan and budget, and promote program extension. Bauer said that the stream crossing program may become more autonomous. He envisions an independent group adopting the program and running it independent from the Foothills Model Forest.



West Fraser Mills Ltd. Hardisty Creek crossing before and after restoration.
Photo credit: West Fraser Mills Ltd., Hinton Wood Products

Aboriginal Involvement Program fostering relationships between industry and Aboriginal communities

Footprints of Aboriginal communities from centuries past can be found throughout the Foothills Model Forest land base. Now, these ancient markers – or culturally important locations – are being identified, with the end goal of preservation and protection, through the Aboriginal Involvement Program.

The locations of spiritual sites and traditional hunting and gathering areas have been passed on orally for generations, but through the Aboriginal Involvement Program, these oral traditions can be transformed into tangible media such as databases and maps.

“These sites are our heritage,” says Jimmy O’Chiese, chief of the Foothills Ojibway Society. “Our cultural values are connected to the land, and we want to protect them for future generations.”

Foothills Model Forest established the Aboriginal Involvement Program in 2001, in recognition of the unique and powerful ties that Aboriginal communities have to the land.

“This is a place to start building relationships with industry and government,” says O’Chiese. “We don’t want to stop development – we want to find a way to preserve these sites by working together.”

One element of the program, driven by five Aboriginal communities who have historic ties to the Foothills Model Forest land base, is to identify and document culturally significant locations. The process involves Aboriginal communities in detailing their ways of life and how these connect them to the land. This information is stored in a GIS database. The data is secure and only available to the community to which it belongs.

All information acquired – documentation and results – belongs to and is controlled entirely by the Aboriginal communities involved: Foothills Ojibway Society,

Aseniwuche Winewak Nation, Nakcowinewak Nation, Sunchild First Nation and Bighorn Stoney First Nation.

The second part of the program is a Referral Process. Through the Referral Process, the program directs industry and government to Aboriginal communities who have sites within an area prior to development.

“Essentially, it facilitates Aboriginal involvement in the day-to-day decisions made by the forestry and petroleum sectors,” says Brad Young, program lead.

By fostering strong relationships, relying on an information base rather than politics and policy, and turning good data into on-the-ground activities, the program acts as a “tool shed” for Aboriginal communities and resource managers, says Young.

West Fraser Mills Ltd., Petro-Canada, Talisman Energy Inc., Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and Luscar Limited –

Coal Valley Mine are industry partners in the program. Government partners include Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, Canadian Forest Service and Jasper National Park.

Alberta’s provincial government is currently engaged in building a province-wide consultation model. Jamie Honda-McNeil, director of Traditional Use for International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations and a member of the Aboriginal Involvement Program steering committee, says the model forest program is a “living classroom” that contributes to the development of best practices for consultation.

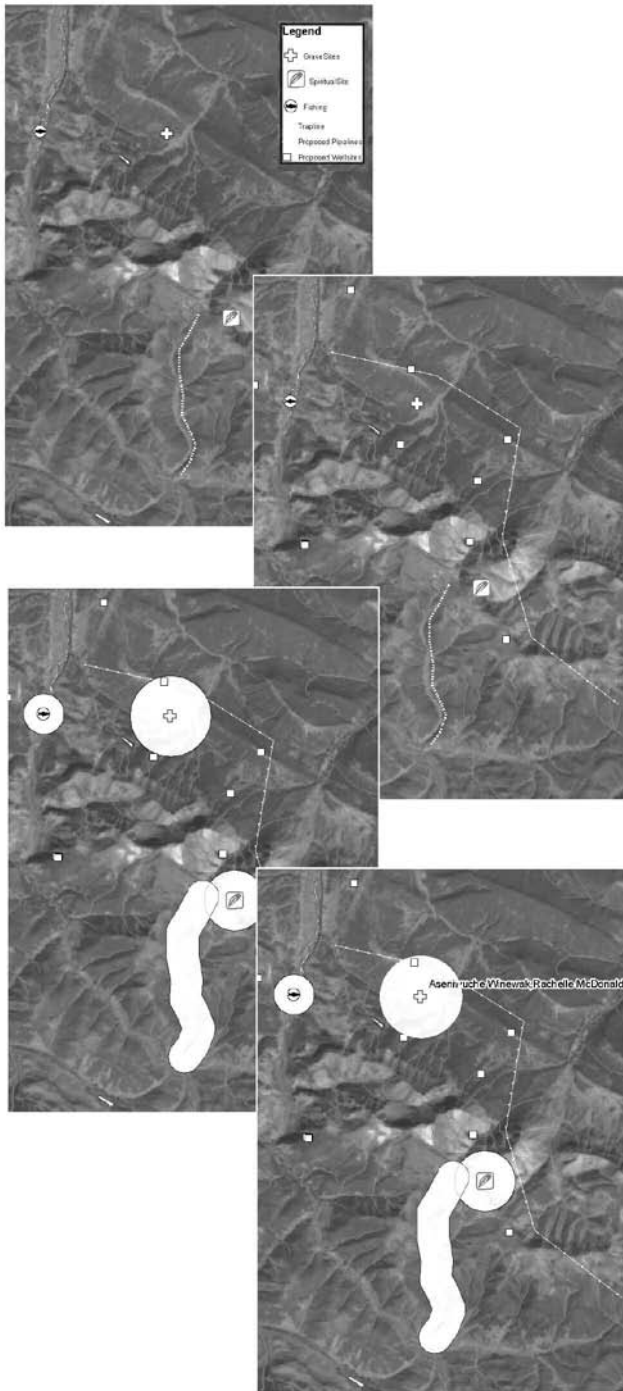
As Foothills Model Forest moves into its next phase, the Aboriginal Involvement Program will continue to evolve and grow, says Young, and perhaps even one day become self-sufficient as a stand-alone entity.



GPS Units are used to document the geographical locations of culturally important sites.
Photo credit: Foothills Model Forest



Photo credit: Foothills Model Forest



Culturally significant sites will be entered into a Geographic Information System (GIS). Industry will then supply information on their proposed activities, which will also be entered into a GIS. Culturally important locations within areas with proposed industrial activities can then be flagged, allowing the referral process to assist industry in contacting the appropriate Aboriginal communities for discussions on the nature of the cultural site and necessary mitigation measures.

Photo Credit: Foothills Model Forest

Shell Canada Limited

A newcomer to the Foothills Model Forest area, Shell Canada sees the Aboriginal Involvement Program, and its Referral Process, as an appealing way to get to know its new neighbours.

Anne McIntosh, public consultation advisor for Shell Canada in Calgary, said that since last July, the company has entered six different exploration plans for sweet natural gas wells into the database.

“In the one instance where there was a potential conflict, we met with the contact person from the Aboriginal community, viewed the site in person, learned about the issue and were able to move that location to accommodate the concern,” said McIntosh. “We were very impressed with how smoothly the process went and we definitely see the potential for further use.”

She said that Shell has been involved with the Foothills Model Forest in the past, through the grizzly bear research program, but now that the company is in the area doing exploration, it recognizes the depth of work that has gone into the development of the Referral Process.

“With five different aboriginal groups with sites in the database, it increases the chances that we don’t inadvertently end up in a location that is in conflict with a traditional use site,” said McIntosh.

Hinton Wood Products (West Fraser Mills Ltd.)

It’s no surprise that Hinton Wood Products, a division of West Fraser Mills Ltd. and champion of the Aboriginal Involvement Program, was first to step up and pilot the Referral Process last year. The company ran its 2006-2007 Annual Operating Plan through the Referral Process.

Aaron Jones, stewardship/public affairs coordinator at Hinton Wood Products and member of the Aboriginal Involvement Program steering committee, said that while the process is still in its infancy, it will become more useful as more data is entered into the database.

“We’ve been involved since the beginning because we see the value and beauty of a one-window approach, where you can refer your development to the model forest and they simply tell you if your development is within a certain distance of a known aboriginal site and provide the necessary contact information,” said Jones.

The company in turn contacts the Aboriginal community that owns the site. In some cases, the end result is no change in the proposed development, if the community determines that the proposal will not impact their site; in other cases, field trips are required and mitigation measures employed.

Until all the Aboriginal communities in West Fraser’s Forest Management Agreement area are onboard, the company will continue to use its existing consultation process alongside the Referral Process.

NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

SUMMER INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

Foothills Model Forest delivers Interpretive Programs about its research and science in Jasper National Park and William A. Switzer Provincial Park. For a complete listing of interpretive programs visit www.fmf.ab.ca or contact Fran Hanington at 780-865-8330 or fran.hanington@gov.ab.ca.

eNOTES, AN ELECTRONIC UPDATE FROM FOOTHILLS MODEL FOREST

eNotes provides subscribers with up-to-date information on research programs, upcoming events and more. For more information, or to subscribe please visit: www.fmf.ab.ca/subscribe.html.

NATURAL DISTURBANCE SHORT COURSE

The Foothills Model Forest Natural Disturbance Program has put together a three day professional short course on the foundations of using a natural disturbance approach to forest land management. The courses will be offered in the spring of 2007. For more information on when and where please visit www.fmf.ab.ca.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND PROGRAM PRESENTATIONS

The Foothills Model Forest Annual General Meeting is June 20, 2007 in Calgary, Alberta. All of the programs under the umbrella of the Foothills Model Forest will be giving presentations on their progress to date. To register, contact Judy Astalos at 780-817-3781 or email judy.astalos@gov.ab.ca.

SOCIAL SCIENCES WORKSHOP

The Social Science Program of Foothills Model Forest will be hosting a one day workshop in Hinton this spring. The workshop will provide an overview of what the social sciences (including economics) or human dimensions research and analysis can bring to the sustainable resource development debate. Suggestions for potential research projects and how to best communicate those results will be collected from attendees and discussed. The opportunity to participate on an activity team to guide future human dimensions research will also be provided. Details will be provided on the FMF website as they become available, www.fmf.ab.ca.

LOCAL LEVEL INDICATORS

The production of the second follow-up state of the forest report for the Foothills Model Forest will be released by October 31, 2007. The report will be available online from the Foothills Model Forest Local Level Indicators webpage. The main idea is to have the report act as a "living document" so that indicators can be posted to the report once they have been completed. This report will be key in identifying change on the landscape and will measure progress towards local and national sustainable forest management. If you are interested in this report please visit www.fmf.ca/publications.html*LocalLevelIndicators.

FOREST STEWARDSHIP RECOGNITION AWARD

The Hardisty Creek Restoration Project is the recipient of the Forest Stewardship Recognition Award from Wildlife Habitat Canada. This award is presented annually to individuals, organizations and companies for outstanding stewardship in Canada's forests.



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In 1992, Natural Resources Canada, through the Canadian Forest Service, initiated Canada's Model Forest Program. The program has successfully built partnerships and conducted sustainable forest management research across Canada. Emphasis is now shifting to the application of model forest research and tools.

The Foothills Model Forest, located in Hinton, Alberta, is an original member in the Canadian Model Forest Network. The sponsoring partners of the Foothills Model Forest are Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Canadian Forest Service, Jasper National Park and West Fraser Mills Ltd. Each sponsor makes a five-year commitment to the organization. The land that each partner manages is included in the 2.75 million hectare Foothills Model Forest land base. Together these sponsors demonstrate their commitment to advancing sustainable forest management in Alberta and Canada.

Canada