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For Immediate Release

Grant Benefits Forest Workers, Ecosystem Restoration in East Kootenay

The provincial government has approved a \$208,000 Job Opportunities Program grant to the Rocky Mountain Trench Natural Resources Society.

The program funds projects that provide short-term employment for laid-off BC forest workers.

The Trench Society is a coalition of nine hunting, ranching, environmental and wildlife organizations dedicated to restoration and conservation of grassland and open forest ecosystems in the East Kootenay and Upper Columbia Valley.

The Society has hired a 12-person crew based out of Cranbrook to work on East Kootenay ecosystem restoration projects.

Their job is to cut and pile small trees, starting this week on the Waldo North project between Lake Kooconusa and Jaffray. Hand slashing, as it is called, is one step in the process of restoring the region's grasslands and open forests.

Prior to hiring, the Society met with Tembec, the United Steelworkers and potential applicants. BC residents employed in timber harvesting, hauling or manufacturing, and laid off after May 1, 2007, are eligible.

The grant covers four months, with a further 12 months of funding still to be approved.

"We've had no trouble getting qualified candidates," Society Coordinator Dan Murphy said. "In fact, we have a waiting list."

The Trench Society crew is the second hired with JOP funding to work on ecosystem restoration in the Rocky Mountain Trench. Galloway Lumber received a six-month grant last fall to hire workers laid off from the company's sawmill.

"Restoring the natural grasslands of the Trench is important to wildlife enthusiasts, ranchers and naturalists," said East Kootenay MLA Bill Bennett. "With market

conditions in the forest industry as weak as they are today, it is gratifying that these hard-working people can have this useful and important job to do.”

The Trench Society agrees that linking job creation to ecosystem restoration is a winning combination. “Hand slashing is labour intensive and it’s expensive,” Murphy said. “The trees we’re thinning have no commercial value and there’s a significant amount of forest that needs this type of work.”

Rocky Mountain Forest District Manager Tony Wideski says funding from the Job Opportunities Program is a great help in moving the restoration program forward.

“The restoration plan for the Trench is to treat about 116,000 hectares over a 30-year period. The work being done by the JOP crews is a valuable contribution towards reaching that goal.”

The Job Opportunities Program is one of three initiatives funded by the federal government and developed by the province to support workers affected by the ongoing downturn in the BC forest industry.

Fifty-seven projects employing approximately 470 people have been approved since the three-year \$26 million jobs program was announced 10 months ago.

The Rocky Mountain Trench Ecosystem Restoration Program is in its tenth year of restoring grasslands and open forests on Crown land. Two stakeholder committees, representing natural resource agencies, industry and the public, direct the program.

Scientists calculate that about 50 per cent of the grasslands and open forests of the southern Rocky Mountain Trench have disappeared since the 1950s. Much of the loss is due to dense forest ingrowth on sites that at one time experienced frequent, low-intensity ground fire.

Studies show that for 400 years these fires burned in the Trench every two to 33 years, keeping excessive tree regeneration in check and maintaining a landscape mosaic of grassland, open forest and closed forest.

Organized fire suppression over the past seven decades has disrupted this fire regime and produced a host of negative consequences.

The Trench restoration program is working to remedy these problems by opening up the forest canopy using logging and other thinning methods, then mimicking the historic fire regime through periodic prescribed burning.

The restoration process encourages growth of native bunchgrasses and shrubs that provide critical forage for elk, deer, bighorn sheep and domestic cattle.

It improves habitat for many rare or vulnerable wildlife species that depend on open forests and grasslands.

It makes for healthier forests by allowing remaining trees to reach their full growth potential and leaving them less prone to attack by insects and disease. Removing forest fuels through thinning also reduces the risk and severity of wildfires.

Visit www.trenchsociety.com for more information on ecosystem restoration in the Rocky Mountain Trench.

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Trench Society directors and staff welcome East Kootenay MLA Bill Bennett and Rocky Mountain Forest District Manager Tony Wideski to their quarterly meeting in Cranbrook. From left: Directors Bill DuBois, Bob Bjorn, Glynn Killins and Gordon Edwards, Forest District Manager Wideski, MLA Bennett, Directors Peter Davidson, Don Lancaster, Maurice Hansen, Kathryn Martell and Dave Quinn and Coordinator Dan Murphy.



Trench Society Chair Peter Davidson, far right, and Coordinator Dan Murphy, second right, welcome East Kootenay MLA Bill Bennett, centre, and Rocky Mountain Forest District Manager Tony Wideski, left, to the Society's quarterly meeting in Cranbrook.

Trench Society Member Organizations, Directors & Alternates

- Cranbrook Archery Club / Marty Cloarec, Cranbrook
- East Kootenay Wildlife Association / Andy Pezderic, Golden / Glynn Killins, Kimberley
- Kootenay Livestock Association / Don Lancaster, Mayook / Harlan Bradford, Skookumchuck
- Rocky Mountain Naturalists / Peter Davidson, Cranbrook / Jim Duncan, Kimberley
- Southern Guides & Outfitters Association / Bill DuBois, Windermere / Doug Goodwin, Edgewater
- The Land Conservancy of BC (Kootenay Region) / Kathryn Martell, Kimberley
- Waldo Stockbreeders Association / Gordon Edwards, Jaffray / Bob Bjorn, Wycliffe
- Wildsight / Dave Quinn, Kimberley
- Windermere Farmers Institute / Bill Coy, Dutch Creek
- Honorary Director: Maurice Hansen, Kimberley