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For Immediate Release

New program aids East Kootenay forestry workers and ecosystem restoration

Grassland restoration in the East Kootenay will benefit from a new program that provides temporary jobs for unemployed BC forest industry workers.

Galloway Lumber Co. Ltd. has been awarded a \$510,000 Job Opportunities Program grant to hire up to 12 workers laid off last year when poor markets forced the company to shut down its sawmill near Jaffray.

The Galloway crew started work three weeks ago on the huge Waldo North grasslands restoration project between Lake Koocanusa and Jaffray. Their job is to thin forest ingrowth on sites that at one time would have been thinned by fire.

Using chainsaws and muscle power, the men have been hand slashing dense thickets of young trees, mostly lodgepole pine, and have already covered 20 hectares.

“The crew is doing high quality work,” said Dan Murphy, Coordinator of the Rocky Mountain Trench Natural Resources Society, which is managing the Waldo restoration project.

“They’re all older guys who’ve worked in the mill for years. Now they’re outside, packing a chainsaw all day, cutting and piling trees. It’s tough work and they’re really throwing themselves into it,” Murphy said.

Over the next six months, the crew will work their way through a total of 632 hectares on the Waldo site and elsewhere. Plans call for thinning 540 hectares and burning logging debris on another 92.

Their efforts are part of the Rocky Mountain Trench Ecosystem Restoration Program, now in its tenth year of restoring grasslands and open forests on Crown land in the East Kootenay.

Galloway Lumber developed its successful Job Opportunities Program proposal in conjunction with the Trench Society and Rocky Mountain Forest District, both members of the ecosystem restoration program’s stakeholder steering committee.

The company's grant is among the first JOP projects to be funded and is the second biggest of the 40 grants awarded in the province so far.

For Galloway Lumber's Bud Nelson, the grant is valuable because it's providing jobs. Forty people were working at the sawmill when it shut down in November 2007.

"It's a good program," said Nelson, who heads the family-owned business. "As soon as I heard about it, I was on board."

The Job Opportunities Program is one of three new programs developed by the province to support BC forest workers during the ongoing downturn in the industry. The programs are funded with \$129 million in federal dollars.

"Getting this grant is a win-win-win situation for everyone involved," said Murphy, who speaks for the Trench Society coalition of nine hunting, ranching, environmental and wildlife organizations. "The restoration program gets expensive labour-intensive work done at virtually no cost, Galloway Lumber keeps some of its skilled work force on hand for the day when the mill-re-opens, and the men have jobs that let them stay close to home."

The 2,000-hectare Waldo North restoration pilot project, where the JOP crew is currently working, was initiated by the Trench Society to determine if restoration projects could be more ecologically effective as well as self-financing. Positive findings from the Waldo project will be applied to the Trench-wide program, which is working toward restoring 118,500 hectares of Crown land by 2030.

Scientists calculate that about 50 per cent of the grasslands and open forests of the southern Rocky Mountain Trench have disappeared since the 1950s, mainly because of fire suppression.

Grasslands and open forests here are classified as fire-maintained ecosystems because frequent, low-intensity ground fires kept excessive tree regeneration in check. Recent fire ecology studies show that for 400 years, these fires burned in the Trench every two to 33 years.

In the absence of fire, seedlings grow into very dense forest stands that produce a host of problems for plants, animals and people.

The Trench restoration program uses logging and thinning to remove excess trees, then follows up with periodic prescribed burns to maintain restored sites. The process produces many benefits.

Opening the forest canopy and setting controlled burns encourages growth of native bunchgrasses and shrubs that provide critical forage for elk, deer, bighorn sheep and domestic cattle.

Removing forest ingrowth improves habitat for many rare or vulnerable wildlife species that depend on open forests and grasslands for survival. About 287 species of plants, animals and insects inhabit these East Kootenay ecosystems.

Thinning dense stands of conifers improves forest health by allowing remaining trees to reach their full growth potential and making them less prone to attack by insects and disease. It also reduces fuel loads, thus lessening the severity of wildfires.

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

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Dan Carlyle.jpg

Dan Carlyle on the Waldo North grasslands restoration site near Jaffray. Carlyle, who started work at Galloway Lumber in 1964, was running a loader when the sawmill shut down last November. He's worked through lots of forest industry highs and lows during his 43 years but says these are the worst lumber market conditions he's ever seen.

MORE PHOTOS FOLLOW ...



JOP crew.jpg

Bud Nelson of Galloway Lumber with some of the sawmill crew now working on ecosystem restoration projects in the Rocky Mountain Trench. From left: Bud Nelson, Jeff Pellegrin, Bruce Clark, Mike Paniec, Percy Smith, Mark Nelson, Dan Carlyle and Mike McNeil. Missing: Michel Plourde, Dwight Olson, Roger Ingham.



Percy Smith.jpg

Percy Smith slashing young lodgepole pine on the Waldo North grasslands restoration site near Jaffray. Smith had 28 years with Galloway Lumber when the sawmill shut down last November.



Work site.jpg

Galloway Lumber's Job Opportunities Program crew opened up this grassland restoration site near Jaffray by thinning forest ingrowth. The small slash piles will be burned later this season.