



Partner Perspectives

Foothills Stream Crossing Program



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FOOTHILLS STREAM CROSSING PROGRAM

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Jerry Bauer
Program Lead
Foothills Stream Crossing Program

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Overview

Foothills Stream Crossing Program was created to bring one major forestry company and eight oil & gas companies together, along with regulatory and conservation stakeholders, to prioritize stream crossing (culvert) problems within watersheds, and improve approaches to rehabilitation and construction. Regulatory and social considerations make this work essential for productive aquatic habitat as well as supplies of clean drinking water for downstream communities including Edmonton.

Challenge

Program Lead Jerry Bauer says an early lack of coordination and cooperation reduced the effectiveness of stream crossing remediation in the foothills region. West Fraser Mills was responsible for a huge management area including numerous watersheds, but thousands of culverts and crossings were being installed by energy and municipal players as new roads were built into the area. One stakeholder might improve an aging culvert, but that did not help overall fish habitat if someone else's culvert upstream was not functioning properly. Companies that naturally compete with each other in the marketplace did not have a good way to talk to each other about the environmental situation.

Solution

"We thought – let's get everyone together, evaluate each of the crossings by watershed, prioritize remediation work according to the needs of fish populations, and share information about best practices to get the job done," says Bauer. The approach promised savings on inspections, planning and repair, as well as better relations with government agencies responsible for water and fish. Those agencies themselves benefit because instead of receiving plans and proposals from multiple companies, they now receive consolidated plans for complete watersheds, making inspection and approvals much easier. Foothills Research Institute, meanwhile, provides indispensable and affordable support with sophisticated mapping and fish prediction software systems, along with data management. "Foothills Research Institute is very good at collecting and storing large amounts of information. This allows us to focus our resources on improving habitat," says Bauer.

Results

Among the tangible results – In 2009, sedimentation issues (caused by impediments to water flow or erosion) were addressed on 47 of 51 crossings in two watersheds (Pine and Nosehill Creek). Five crossings were mitigated for fish passage issues and 29 km of blocked stream habitat was opened up. In 2010, the partners plan to address the remaining sedimentation problems and to open another 15 km of habitat. Three more watershed remediation plans will be submitted to the provincial government and work will begin on a remediation plan for the Edson River. Last, but not least, nine companies plus regulators at the provincial and federal levels are talking to each other about the best way to look after Alberta's water and fish resources.

Learn more at www.foothillsresearchinstitute.ca