

# Social Science Program



## Understanding potential social and economic impacts of risks.

The Social Science program investigates the human dimension of land use management in the Foothills Research Institute with the goal of assisting policy makers. A public survey of Foothills Research Institute and Edmonton residents revealed that the public is not very well informed with respect to grizzly bears but would be willing to see a decrease in industrial activity to ensure the maintenance of a healthy bear population. The results also showed support for local input in grizzly bear management decisions that affect not only the bears but also the livelihoods of Foothills Research Institute residents.



Previous work on economic indicators was updated highlighting the increase in oil and gas activity and the volatility of the coal sector. Social indicators were also updated revealing a declining and ageing population based on the most recent census data available (2001). Incomes remained high but the gap between rich and poor increased following national trends. School enrolment increased over previous studies.

Natural resource accounting measures the flow of benefits from a resource base and the ability of that base to maintain that flow. These benefits are often not captured in traditional economic measures such as Gross Domestic Product. The Foothills Research Institute area receives many benefits from the forest beyond pulp and lumber production. Foremost among these is biodiversity conservation with subsistence use, recreation, and carbon sequestration also being important.

The potential exists for much more work to be done on the human dimensions of land use management in the region. Water has been noted as an important issue for the area and questions about its value, trade offs, and public attitudes merit continued research.

## Beyond Boredom

Contrary to popular opinion, the causes of substance abuse in Hinton, and other resource-based communities, are not simply because people are bored and have too much money. In fact, recent research suggests that one of the main causes of substance abuse in Hinton is a lack of healthy social connections among family and community members may cause residents to feel isolated and unfulfilled, and thus more susceptible to developing an unhealthy attachment to alcohol and drugs.

In a recent report called *Beyond Boredom: Contributing Factors to Substance Abuse in Hinton, Alberta*, researchers explored social and economic factors that contribute to alcohol and drug abuse. What is it about the community of Hinton that limits healthy social connections? This study revealed five main features of the community that may be decreasing the level of social cohesion and facilitating a path towards alcohol and drug abuse 1) multiple, divergent sectors, 2) high income, 3) shift work, 4) transience, and 5) a union environment.

Substance abuse in Hinton is deeply rooted in family, work, and community life. As the root causes of substance abuse are multi-faceted, addressing the issue requires a broader dialogue and the development of holistic, well-integrated solutions, now and into the future. If left unchecked, substance abuse will continue to place downward pressure on community sustainability, decreasing human capacities, limiting healthy social connections, and affecting future generations.



Foothills Research Institute is a leader in developing innovative science and knowledge for integrated resource management on the forest landscape through diverse and actively engaged partnerships.

The Foothills Research Partnership Ltd. landbase is located in west-central Alberta, and is based in the resource community of Hinton, some three hours west of Edmonton. It covers roughly 2.75 million hectare (27,500 square kilometres), and embodies Jasper National Park of Canada, the Willmore Wilderness Park, and the Forest Management Area of Hinton Wood Products, a Division of West Fraser Mills Ltd. It also includes some provincial "crown forest management units" and the Hinton Training Centre's Cache Percotte Training Forest. Within its boundaries are three forest areas—boreal, montane, and sub-alpine—and many forest uses including timber, petroleum, and coal extraction, tourism, and recreation.

We welcome inquiries: Box 6330 Hinton, Alberta Canada • T7V 1X6 • T: 780.865.8330 • F: 780.865.8331 • [foothillsresearchinstitute.ca](http://foothillsresearchinstitute.ca)

