Foothills Model Forest hosts tours

BIRGIT STUTZ

The Foothills Model Forest invites the public to step inside its giant laboratory and discover the intricacies of an actively managed forest on a guided tour.

"The tours are going to be interactive and are offering a really good opportunity for the public to get out into the forest and to view up close what’s going on and how the forests are being managed," said Fiona Ragan, an interpreter with Foothills Model Forest.

"We will talk about wildlife and the human impact on it, and we will spend some time at a stream and talk about fish and aquatic issues." The tour will also take visitors to the site where the last large-scale forest fire occurred in this area.

"We will talk about the importance of wildfire on the forest ecosystem and how humans have affected the role of fire on the landscape," Ragan said. "A professional forester will be on the tour and will talk about old growth forest and clear cutting issues."

The tour will also stop at Gregg Cabin, where historical, cultural and recreational values of the forests will be discussed.

"One of the things we aim to do (at the Foothills Model Forest) is learn how to practice sustainable forest management and to do that without impairing other forest values," said Ragan. "Sustainable development is a balancing act of different perspectives and values, and the tours will give a clearer picture of that."

The four-hour tours will be offered free of charge to the general public on Aug. 15, 29 and Sept. 12 in partnership with the Hinton Forest Capital 2000 committee. Lunch and transportation will be provided. Please contact Ragan at 865-6972 for further information and to pre-register.

The Foothills Model Forest is located in west-central Alberta and covers an area of approximately 2.75 million hectares. Included in the landbase are the forest management area of Weldwood of Canada Ltd., Hinton division, Jasper National Park, Willmore Wilderness Park, various provincial crown forest management units and the Environmental Training Centre’s Cache Percotte training forest. The area itself lies within the boreal, montane and sub-alpine forest regions of Canada. The model forest is centred in the town of Hinton.

The Foothills Model Forest is one of eleven model forests across Canada that make up the model forest network.

The network is funded and administered by Natural Resources Canada and the Canadian Forest Service with other cash and in-kind contributions provided by program partners. The Foothills Model Forest has three principle partners/sponsors who represent the agencies with vested land management authority for the land base covered by the Model Forest. They include Weldwood, Alberta’s Department of Environmental Protection, and Heritage Canada (Parks Canada, Jasper National Park).

For more information on the Foothills Model Forest, check out its website at www.fmn.ab.ca.