

Over 230 attend Boreal Conference

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Last weekend some of Canada's outstanding scientists gathered in Athabasca for the first ever Boreal Forest Conference. The scientists weren't there to talk to each other, but to inform the public about the beauty and ecology of the forest around us and to the north of us.

Twenty speakers gave talks on such topics as trees, wildlife, fire, forest management, timber harvesting and regulations, tourism, global warming, and planning for the future. Many of the speakers are university professors with a lifelong history of teaching and research in their subject matter. Also speaking were representatives from government, private consultants, and the timber industries. One of the most interesting and hopeful presentations came from a scientist employed by the Weldwood pulp and timber mill in Hinton.

For several years there has been talk of Athabasca becoming a conference centre. The critics have always stated "Who would want to come to Athabasca? Where would they stay? We don't have the facilities." In other words, "It can't be done".

Last week's conference demonstrated that a good sized conference can be held here successfully with existing facilities - as long as there is considerable community support.

Over 230 people attended the Boreal Forest conference. But for every three visitors there was at least one local person who volunteered effort, food or sleeping



Canadians are starting to see the forest for the trees

accommodations or cooperated in other ways. The conference was organized as a public service by the Friends of the Athabasca Environmental Association (FOTA). About a dozen members of the society organized the event but at least a dozen others con-

tributed in some substantial way.

The conference had a small amount of financial support from Athabasca University, Alberta Forest Products Association, and the Friends of Environmental Education Society of Alberta, but most of the expenses were paid

by registration fees charged. For a conference with speakers from as far away as Toronto and Idaho, the registration fee of \$50 for the three days was quite modest.

Visitors arrived mainly by car, but many came by bus. They stayed in local commercial establishments as well as in private homes, the Meanook Biology Station, and at the Athabasca campsite. Meals were taken in local restaurants and light lunches were provided by the conference organizers, including donations from several local gardens. Arrangements were made with several of the high school home economics classes to provide baked goods. Local businesses

kindly extended credit for various expenses incurred by FOTA.

People came to Athabasca for the Boreal Forest Conference from as far away as British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, Ontario and Idaho to learn about what is happening to the largest ecosystem in Canada, the great Boreal Forest.

Over and over visitors remarked on the beauty of the setting of the town, the stimulating talks, and the dedication of the volunteers who made the conference possible.

Over 230 people came for a weekend. Now what could we do with a little more experience, and better facilities?