Desmond I. Crossley, the man after whom the site is named in tribute, was a forester, an active member of the Canadian Institute of Forestry/Institut forestier du Canada and a number of other associations during his professional career. Des Crossley was born in Lloyminster, Saskatchewan in 1910, to one of the Barr Colony pioneer families. He graduated from the University of Toronto’s Faculty of Forestry in 1935, and soon joined the federal Department of Agriculture at Indian Head, Saskatchewan as a tree planting supervisor in shelterbelt projects under the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act. While there, he continued his studies and was awarded his MSC from the University of Minnesota in 1940.

Between 1940 and 1945 he was a navigational trainer for the Royal Canadian Air Force, serving in Canada and England, rising to the rank of Squadron Leader. Following demobilization, he joined the Canadian Forest Service (CFS) in Calgary and for the next 10 years conducted ground-breaking research in the ecology and silviculture of lodgepole pine and white spruce. It was during this time he initiated the comprehensive research trials at Strachan.

In the 1940s and ‘50s, Alberta’s forestry industry had been shifting towards a more socially responsible and sustainable model of harvesting. On March 29, 1949, the Provincial Government passed a revised Forests Act authorizing the creation of agreements between forest industry and government for growing continuous and perpetually successive tree crops. Until then, there had been no forest inventories and therefore no basis on which to develop management plans. During the 1950s, reforestation was largely dependent on natural processes, which limited success.

In 1955, Alberta’s first large-scale forest enterprise—North Western Pulp and Power Ltd.—was beginning operations in Hinton and offered Des the job of Chief Forester, with full authority to establish and implement a sustainable forest management program. Long frustrated by his inability as a scientist to see his research turned into practice, he took on the challenge and put in place a program that has been recognized both nationally and internationally.

One of his earlier accomplishments was his development of a framework of operational ground rules in 1958, with the assistance of the Alberta Forest Service. The framework established a precedent for adaptive forest management, defining the practice decades prior to its adoption into the lexicon of North American forestry. Particularly important was a condition mandating the practice of adopting as many modifications of a cutting system “as possible in order, by experiment, to arrive at a system or systems best adapted to the silvicultural requirements of the species in question”. [1]

During his 20-year (1955–75) career with NWP&P he continued to study and adapt practices through research by his old colleagues in the CFS as well as what he called “sore thumb” or short-term research trials by himself and his forestry staff for quick results. During his tenure as Chief Forester, Des worked extensively to achieve sustained yield management through natural reforestation. He pioneered the use of scarifiers for the regeneration of lodgepole pine and introduced the use of alternate strip cuts for regeneration of white spruce. His approach, based on experience and knowledge, much of it gained at Strachan, involved clearcutting and site preparation for natural regeneration in order to shorten the recovery period following harvest.

Des wrote over 40 papers and articles on silviculture and forest management in professional and trade journals and Canadian Forest Service research papers. He presented an invited paper on silviculture at the World Forestry Congress in Madrid in 1966.

Des Crossley believed in a strong professional contribution. He was active in the Canadian Institute of Forestry/Institut forestier du Canada, one of the founders and early Chairs of the Rocky Mountain Section. In 1966 he was elected President of the Institute and in 1970 he was the recipient of the Institute’s Canadian Forestry Achievement Award in recognition of consistent and exceptional contributions over a lifetime of dedication to forestry. He was made a Fellow of the Institute in 1979. On October 31, 1975, following a long and successful career over thirty-odd years, Des retired from the Company and entered a new phase of his career as a consulting forester.

Following retirement, he delivered the H.R. MacMillan Lectureship at the University of British Columbia in 1976 and in recognition of his contributions to Canadian forestry was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws from the University of Toronto in 1982, delivering the convocation address. Des Crossley passed away in 1986 but the work he completed over the course of his life...
continues to influence forestry best-practices. In 1997, to celebrate and recognize this contribution, the Company named its industrial forest (south half) the Crossley Forest and the north half the Loomis Forest, after AFS forester Reg Loomis who also made a remarkable contribution to the development of the forest management program.

After over half a century, foresters at the Hinton Wood Products operation continue to employ the adaptive management precedent implemented by Des. There have been remarkable advances in the practical applications of sustainable forest management with a dimension of accountability resulting in an industry-wide move towards the adoption of more efficient and effective practices. Through ecologically appropriate silviculture and revolutionary growth and yield programs, allowable annual cuts have been maintained and increased over time—part of the legacy of Crossley’s trials at what became the Crossley Demonstration Forest at Strachan.

From Research to Learning

The Des Crossley Demonstration Forest is a 65-hectare section of forested land about 20 minutes southwest of Rocky Mountain House. It is a relatively dense, even-aged 125-year-old lodgepole pine stand and was initially the research site developed by the Canadian Forest Service in the 1950s. In 1975 management was transferred to the Department of Renewable Resources of the University of Alberta. When the initial research role was completed in 1997, objectives for the forest were changed from research to education and the site was renamed in recognition of Crossley’s contributions and outstanding commitment to forest management.

During the 1950s, the site supported studies to evaluate the silvics of different cutting systems to regenerate and manage lodgepole pine. From 1951 to 1953, the research layout was surveyed and logging and clear-cutting activities were carried out. The goal was to establish guidelines on the most effective silvicultural practices for thinning, harvesting and regeneration of lodgepole pine. Experiments included stand improvement, harvesting, conversion cuts, scarification, seed dissemination studies, phenological investigations and complementary studies in entomology and pathology. The research on the site was instrumental in setting the stage for how western lodgepole pine forests are regenerated today. In short, Des Crossley determined that clearcutting pine and doing drag scarification are the most successful ways to regenerate a pine forest.

In the late 1990s, Jim Martin from Inside Education and Tom Daniels from Sundre Forest Products Ltd. met to discuss the possibility of developing a demonstration forest in the Rocky Mountain House area to draw students and educators from across central Alberta. Later, a number of stakeholders came together to evaluate the feasibility of transforming the site into a Demonstration Forest. It was determined that the Des Crossley Demonstration Forest represented a strong opportunity for use as a learning and awareness resource for students, educators, and forest professionals alike. Program development was led by Sundre Forest Products Ltd. in collaboration with Inside Education. Other stakeholders over the years of operation have included representatives from Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, the University of Alberta, Canadian Forest Service and Devon Energy.

Sundre Forest Products Ltd. is a division of West Fraser, a British Columbia-based company that is now the country’s largest lumber producer. The organization operates more than 35 mills across Western Canada and the Southern United States, with production primarily of limber and southern yellow pine. Inside Education is a non-profit society that works to promote, coordinate, and support the delivery of environmental education across the province. Established in 1985, the organization supplies resources to Canadian teachers and students for science and technology specific topics. Inside Education is responsible for the development and utilization of on-site learning tools as well as outreach initiatives to promote awareness of resources within the teaching community.

The Des Crossley Educational/Demonstration Forest Program was developed with several main objectives: to educate students and educators in an outdoor learning environment, to provide programming to minimize preparation and maximize learning, and to provide a site conducive to educating the public about forestry. The Program was established in 1998 and has been run in several batches, growing over time to incorporate additional audiences and activities. Since its inception, goals have evolved to include a number of awareness initiatives. The field-based learning facility presents an opportunity for the general public to increase its knowledge of the multiple uses of forests, integrated land management, and sustainable forest management. The ultimate goal is to improve public understanding and appreciation of forest resources. Increased awareness will result in a greater number of potential
Progress on Ambitious Goals of Vision 2020

The Forest Products Association of Canada (FPAC) released its first report card on Vision2020, *Pathways to Prosperity* in mid-June. It showed progress on the three parameters of products, environmental performance and people and issues a call to action to build on the momentum to date.

"I'm pleased to say our efforts began to bear fruit during the first two years of our ten-year Vision plan for jobs, growth and continuous improvement in the industry's environmental record," said the President and CEO of FPAC, David Lindsay.

Vision2020 was launched in May 2012 as a challenge to industry as well as governments, academic researchers, policy thinkers and other partners to build on the sector's transformation. The Vision goals are to refresh the industry's environmental record, putting the sector on pace to reach its Vision goals. The industry saw only a modest increase in the recession hit in 2008 the program was discontinued for several years as the forest industry turned all attention to maintaining mill operations. With funding from the Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta (FRIA) the site re-opened for use in 2012. A new clearcut area was prepared giving over 100 students and teachers an opportunity to see logging in action directly on-site.

Currently, the Des Crossley Demonstration Forest represents central Alberta's premier forest education centre. Students nine to 17 years-of-age are able to study forest development, regeneration and wildlife interactions, as well as being exposed to career options within the forest industry. *Inside Education* actively promoted the learning opportunity at Alberta Teachers' Association conventions, leading to two fully subscribed delivery seasons, May–June and September–October. During the 2013 offering, participation included 1786 students, 65 teachers, and 256 other adults.

For Further Information See: 

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