

Utility Tree Worker Taking Training to First Nations Communities

In our continued effort to improve the accessibility of certified training programs to those who need it, Olds College has been working with two separate First Nations communities in offering training for Utility Tree Workers and Utility Tree Trimmers.



In December, three Olds College Continuing Education instructors provided a pre-requisite Utility Tree Workers training course at Little Buffalo, AB for members of the Lubicon Lake Band #453. Eighteen members of the Lubicon Lake Band took part in the training. The program was designed to help them in their preparations for the Utility Tree Worker Certification courses offered at Olds College each spring.

After a successful first run, the program was offered for a second time, this time for a group of 12 from the Sucker Creek First Nation, located on the southwestern shore of Lesser Slave Lake, roughly 22 kilometers east of High Prairie.

"There is a significant demand for certified Utility Tree Workers in Alberta," explains Sharyl James, Continuing Education Programmer at Olds College. "There are thousands of kilometers of powerlines that need to be maintained every year, and a very specialized skill set is required to do that. Trained workers are needed to ensure that trees encroaching on powerlines are trimmed safely and properly, to reduce the risk of forest fires, and damaged power lines."

The College was initially contacted by Doug Gladue of the Lubicon Lake band to see if we could bring this training opportunity to their community. There was a significant need for this type of training, however it was difficult for workers to travel to a college campus to attend the training. Once it was determined that there would be enough students, program coordinator Sharyl James worked with the band to build a customized program that would allow the bands to have workers begin the process of becoming certified Utility Tree Workers.

Olds College Arboriculture Instructional Assistant Charlene Scott helped to develop a customized program, and was accompanied by contract instructor Grant McGill of JEMM Tree Services to the training in Lubicon Lake to instruct the students on climbing. Garry Murdoch joined the pair to teach the students about electrical safety. Grant was joined by Jeff Dool of Raventree Services in delivering the Sucker Creek training session.



The training program includes instruction on tree climbing, electrical awareness, and general safety in the industry. This helps the students to reach the pre-requisites of the certification program, which includes experience climbing, chainsaw competency, electrical awareness and more. Students seeking certification need to be confident enough while climbing trees to do rescues. After completing the program, workers will be able to find jobs in the industry so they can gain the experience needed to complete the certification process through the Professional Vegetation Managers Association and become professional Utility Tree Workers. Graduates could even go on to working in other areas, including conservation, or tree trimming, pruning and care.

“Olds College is committed to meeting the needs of Indigenous learners and we have found increased success when we bring the training to their communities,” explains Dr. Jason Dewling, Vice President of Academic and Research at Olds College. “Establishing these customized programs for the Lubicon Lake and Sucker Creek First Nations will train certified professional workers in two communities who need them. We are excited to work with these communities and increase access to our programs through similar offerings in the future.” 🍄

