

ALBERTA EMERALD AWARDS

Balancing development with environment

The 24th Annual Emerald Awards, that recognize and celebrate dozens of environmental leaders across the province, will be presented on June 4 at the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton.

From big energy producers to small entrepreneurs, the Alberta Emerald Awards showcase projects that demonstrate environmental excellence and set an example for everyone across the province.

Since 1992, the Emerald Awards, administered by the Alberta Emerald Foundation, has shared more than 2,500 examples of creative thinking and innovation in environmental management systems, technologies and education programs. By celebrating this excellence, the Alberta Emerald Foundation is helping to raise public's awareness of the tremendous growth in these different areas in recent years.

Every year, the Alberta Emerald Foundation receives nominations in 10 established cross-sectoral categories. A panel of knowledgeable third-party judges with experience

in a variety of different sectors get together to review the stacks of nominations. The panel chooses a maximum of three nominees in each of the eight Emerald Award categories as finalists. Only one per category will take home the award.

"Every year the Emerald's tell the stories of our most beloved and cherished Albertans, our environmental stewards," says Raquel (Rocky) Feroe, three-year Emerald Award judge. "The Emerald Awards are a great way for anyone with a love for our province to learn from our best."

The Emerald Awards recognize and reward outstanding environmental initiatives undertaken by individuals, not-for-profit associations, large and small corporations, community groups and governments from across Alberta.

"We are the only Foundation in the country to recognize the important work of environmental leaders across all sectors," says Alan Ross, Chair of the Board, Alberta



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Emerald Foundation. "By honouring and elevating the ingenuity, dedication and hard work of these individuals and organizations, we inspire others to follow their example, benefiting all Albertans with a healthier and cleaner environment."

Since its inception 23 years ago, the Emerald Awards has recognized more than 450 finalists and 250 recipients. Over the years, each of the organizations or individuals nomi-

inated, made a finalist or awarded a winner of an Emerald Award has, in their own unique and individual way, helped Alberta balance its growth and resource development with the preservation of our environment.

In the face of new and increasing pressures on landscapes across the province, the Alberta Emerald Foundation aims to be the catalyst to raise the expectations and performance of environmental stewardship.

Largest reclaimed wetland in the oil sands

In 2007, Syncrude wanted to transform a tailings structure into a thriving wetland. The oil sands mining company didn't have a lot of information to draw on. But it started out on the ambitious project to learn how to design and incorporate peat-forming wetlands for reclamation in the boreal forests of Northern Alberta.

Syncrude established the interdisciplinary Sandhill Fen Technical Advisory Panel to guide work on the Sandhill Fen Research Watershed Initiative. The Syncrude initiative developed a watershed on 52 hectares

of sand-capped soft tailings in part of what was once a 60-metre deep mine.

They planted more than 100,000 trees and shrubs as well as 21 different mosses and the former mine. All the vegetation was selected to mirror the plants that were growing in the natural fens in the area.

Syncrude finished building the watershed in 2012. The area will be monitored carefully for up to 20 years to track the progress of the largest reclaimed wetland in the oil sands and the first time a landform was built on oil sands tailings.

In nature, fen wetlands can take thousands of years to become established. And while this project is still in its early years, the results have been encouraging.

Studies indicate that peat transplanted from a natural environment is able to grow in a newly-constructed area. As well, native plants have taken seed and are growing all on their own. Furthermore, after a few growing seasons, the Sandhill Fen Watershed is attracting wildlife back to the area.

Syncrude worked with dozens of researchers and scientists from eight

universities across North America on the project, which is producing a lot of important information about improving methods of reclamation of wetlands.

The best practices gleaned from Sandhill Fen project will help with reclamation projects Syncrude and the entire oil sands industry.

The oil sands company is dedicated to furthering reclamation research as part of its overall commitment to return land disturbed by mining to a productive, biologically self-sustaining ecosystem.