

LRIGS Students Participate in TransAlta Reclamation Activity with Aboriginal Youth

Sarah Ficko and Valerie Miller, two PhD students in the LRIGS program, participated in a TransAlta organized reclamation activity involving school children from the Paul First Nation.



Poplar stand from which cuttings were collected at TransAlta's Highvale mine site

Earlier this year, LRIGS hosted a panel discussion entitled, "Land Reclamation Through An Aboriginal Lens". Sarah and Valerie were active participants with many questions which caught the attention of Dan Kuchmak, Reclamation Planning Specialist from TransAlta. At the end of the event Dan spoke with Sarah and Valerie and invited them to the reclamation activity which happened on Thursday, March 27.

The Highvale mine is located approximately 70 kilometres west of Edmonton, south of Lake Wabamun. TransAlta made arrangements to involve Grade 6 students from a school on the nearby Paul First Nation in a harvesting activity close to the active mine site. Together with the students, their teacher and teaching assistants, two elders, Eckehart Marenholtz from Chickadee Reclamation Services and TransAlta employees (including Dan), Sarah and Valerie collected willow and poplar cuttings from land soon to be mined for coal.



Collecting willow cuttings at TransAlta's Highvale mine site

As part of the reclamation process, the cuttings collected were transplanted to reclaimed mine land at the Whitewood Mine which was closed in 2010. The planting event took place in June with almost 800 trees planted adjacent to a newly established wetland.

Dan explained to Sarah and Valerie that TransAlta's goal was to create opportunities for the school children to see reclamation in its initial stages and then follow a reclamation project throughout their education. All students participating will be invited back to the transplant site often throughout their school years to see the long term reclamation process and its results.



LRIGS students, Sarah Ficko (left) and Valerie Miller (right)

The activity lasted most of the day and Sarah and Valerie really enjoyed the opportunity to work with the school children and, at the same time, to talk to them about how land reclamation works and its importance. They would gladly participate in similar events again.