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VEGETATION MANAGER magazine 2026

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PVMA
PROFESSIONAL VEGETATION MANAGERS ASSOCIATION

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

- BOB GORDON, PRESIDENT PVMA



PVMA President, Bob Gordon

On behalf of the PVMA, I would like to thank our members, staff, volunteers, instructors, committee members, and industry partners for the important role they continue to play in the success of this association.

Having served on several committees before becoming President, I have had the opportunity to see firsthand how much work goes into organizing conferences, managing the UTT/UTW program, keeping up with new technology, navigating herbicide-use regulations, and continually looking for ways to strengthen the association.

The PVMA continues to be an association that leads the way as a representative of industry, stakeholders, and our overall membership. I am proud to be a part of this association and proud of the work that so many people contribute to its continued success.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1. PROTECT THE UTT/UTW PROFESSIONS: Continue to protect the integrity of the Utility Tree Trimmer and Utility Tree Worker programs while supporting a competent and safe workforce.

2. ADVOCATE FOR INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC REGULATIONS: Continue to represent the sector on OHS Part 40, AEUC-related concerns, and regulatory discussions affecting work near energized power lines.

3. MODERNIZE PROGRAM DELIVERY: Support app development and digital recordkeeping improvements to replace or improve paper-based logbooks and proficiency records.

4. SUPPORT TRADE RECOGNITION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: Continue discussions with government and related arboriculture groups while keeping the PVMA mandate clear.

5. STRENGTHEN MEMBER AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT: Keep industry, stakeholders, instructors, committee members, and members involved as PVMA moves forward.

6. TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITAL MODERNIZATION
The PVMA has begun moving toward digital solutions that can improve certification support, proficiency record management, and program administration. The current direction includes app development intended to replace or improve PVMA logbooks and support UTT/UTW demonstrated proficiency records.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend sincere appreciation to the PVMA Board of Directors, the UTT/UTW Board of Governors, the Executive Director and administrative staff, instructors, evaluators, volunteers, industry partners, sponsors, and every member who contributes time and expertise to this association.

The achievements of the PVMA are possible because people across the industry continue to support the association, the program, and the workers who rely on professional training and representation.

CLOSING REMARKS

The PVMA has built a strong legacy over several decades. That legacy continues because of the people who support this association and because of the shared commitment to safe, professional vegetation management.

Together, we will continue to advocate for our industry, strengthen our training programs, protect worker safety, modernize our tools, and ensure that the Applicators and Utility Tree Trimmer and Utility Tree Worker professions remain recognized and respected throughout the industry.

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"IT IS THE MISSION OF THE PVMA TO PROVIDE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT INDUSTRIES, RELATED AGENCIES AND THE PUBLIC WITH COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN THE AREA OF INDUSTRIAL VEGETATION MANAGEMENT."

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INDUSTRY PROFILE: VAL EICHELT



After graduating from Grant McEwan College (now McEwan University) as a legal assistant, Val Eichelt started her career in a medium sized Law office in downtown Edmonton, working primarily in real estate law. After getting married and moving to Leduc she went to work at a small law office in Nisku, where she continued working in real estate law as well as foreclosure, often meeting with the clients herself. She also took on the bookkeeping and payroll duties, as well as management of the lawyer Trust account. In addition to her full-time job at the law office, Val helped on her husband's family farm by running farm equipment, butchering chickens, feeding cattle, and delivering calves. Val and her husband began accumulating their own herd of Registered Polled Hereford cattle during that time. She left the law office in 1988 when their first child was born. Her focus shifted to raising their 4 children, and farming. After the family farm was sold in 1995 she and her husband purchased their own small farm west of Leduc. There they had cattle for a few years, and horses, and Val began raising and selling broiler chickens as a business, raising over 400 chickens a year.

In 2003 Val returned to the off-farm workforce, working part-time as the Administrator for Devon Community Church, where she ran the day-to-day administrative operations of the church as well as the bookkeeping and payroll. In this role she had to learn the world of Microsoft, Simply Accounting, and all the CRA requirements for a not-for-profit and charity. She also developed a policies binder, created payroll files, set up other record keeping systems, and applied for grants. When their children grew up, Val wanted to work a few more hours so she began looking for either a replacement job with more hours, or an additional job that would work with her church hours.

In the summer of 2015, Val noticed an ad in the local paper for an office assistant for the PVMA. Having no idea what the PVMA was or did, she took a chance and applied. The online application process was not really working, or she couldn't figure it out, so she was going to give up but decided to email her resume directly to the then Executive Director, Neil Thiessen. Val figured they are never going to hire someone who couldn't even figure out how to apply online. She found out after that the system wasn't working, and she isn't sure anyone else was even able to apply. After an initial phone call with Neil talking about what the job would potentially look like, and going over some questions, Neil arranged an in-person interview with both himself and then President, Brandon Tupper. That interview felt to Val like they had already decided they were going to hire her, and they were trying to sell her on the job. Neil & Brandon were looking at office space that day with the intention of setting up a physical office for the PVMA, along with the hiring of a part-time permanent office assistant. Val was hired to start August 22, 2015, the day all the files, etc. were being moved to the new office. The PVMA agreed to coordinate Val's workdays with the church's workdays so she could work both jobs.

Val's first duties with the PVMA were to pick out and order office furniture and set up a payroll account with CRA, since she would be the very first non-contract employee. There was also an arrangement made with the UVMA to share office space and for PVMA to provide UVMA with administrative support. Val says she knew absolutely nothing about the Vegetation Management Industry, but she knew how to run an office with minimal supervision and understood the Corporate Registry and CRA filing requirements of a not-for-profit. She loved the challenge of it all. As her role grew into Office Manager, she was tasked with hiring an assistant who primarily looks after the UTT-UTW part of things. A couple of years ago she transitioned a lot of the UVMA administration to PVMA's current assistant, Nicole. The demands in both offices during the busy December-March months was a bit much, so in 2021 Val made the difficult decision to leave her church job, after 18 years, to focus primarily on PVMA. PVMA also arranged for Val to provide IVMA Man-Sask with temporary administrative assistance while they caught up on some outstanding matters. This past August marked her 11th year with the PVMA.

Val says that as the PVMA continues to gain momentum the job continues to morph and grow. Exciting things are happening. The exploration of a recognized Trade Designation, the development of a UTT-UTW app, and the possibility of IVMA Man-Sask coming under the umbrella of the PVMA all speak to the strength of the PVMA and to the dedication and hard work of all the Board members, staff, and volunteers.

Just over a year ago, Val took on a new role in her personal life of Grandma. In January she will become part-time babysitter for her beautiful granddaughter, a role she knows she will love. Because of that new role, she is stepping back from her PVMA Office Manager position effective December 31st. She will spend the next few months training her replacement. Val has agreed to continue providing bookkeeping support, for the time being.

Val would like to thank each of the Presidents and Directors that she has had the privilege of working with over the years, and all the PVMA members that she has gotten to know. She has enjoyed working alongside Nicole as well and says PVMA is extremely fortunate to have her on the team. She is looking forward to seeing the PVMA continue to grow.



Advantage VM

As we wrap up our 10th anniversary year, all of us at AdvantageVM would like to thank our dedicated customers and supporters. Your trust, loyalty, and partnership over the past decade have made this remarkable milestone possible.

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We are proud to celebrate 10 years serving the VM industry and look forward to continuing our journey together for many years to come.

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MANAGING WORKPLACE STRESS

A CRITICAL SAFETY RESPONSIBILITY

- SUBMITTED BY BY BOB GORDON, PVMA PRESIDENT

SAFETY MESSAGE

Stress is not a sign of weakness. Recognizing it early and seeking support are important steps in maintaining fitness for duty, sound decision-making, and a safe workplace.

SAFETY STARTS WITH LOOKING AFTER OURSELVES

When we talk about safety, we often think about equipment inspections, hazard assessments, personal protective equipment, and safe work procedures. While these are all important, one of the most overlooked workplace hazards is stress.

Stress affects every worker differently. What may be manageable for one person may be overwhelming for another. Whether the source is work demands, family responsibilities, financial concerns, health issues, fatigue, or major life events, unmanaged stress can negatively affect physical and mental well-being.

WHY STRESS MATTERS TO SAFETY

In utility vegetation management and field operations, workers must make sound decisions, remain alert to hazards, communicate effectively, and work safely around equipment, traffic, electrical infrastructure, and changing environmental conditions. Excessive stress can interfere with these essential safety behaviours.

- Reduced concentration and situational awareness
- Poor decision-making or memory lapses
- Increased fatigue and slower reactions
- Irritability or conflict with coworkers
- Greater potential for incidents and near misses

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF STRESS

Recognizing stress early is one of the best ways to prevent it from becoming a larger concern. Warning signs may include:

PHYSICAL	EMOTIONAL	BEHAVIOURAL
Headaches	Anxiety	Withdrawal from coworkers
Muscle tension	Irritability	Poor attendance
Fatigue	Mood swings	Reduced performance
Difficulty sleeping	Feeling overwhelmed	Increased frustration
Digestive problems	Difficulty concentrating	Neglecting responsibilities

PRACTICAL WAYS TO MANAGE STRESS

1. TALK ABOUT IT

Speak with your supervisor, a trusted coworker, Human Resources, family, friends, or an available support program. Talking through a concern can be the first step toward finding a solution.

2. TAKE CARE OF YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH

Prioritize sleep, hydration, nutritious meals, regular activity, and healthy recovery. Avoid relying on alcohol, drugs, or other harmful coping mechanisms.

3. PRIORITIZE AND PLAN

Break large challenges into smaller tasks. Identify what you can control today and ask for clarification or assistance when priorities are competing.

4. TAKE BREAKS

Use scheduled breaks to reset your attention, manage fatigue, and return to the task with improved focus.

5. MAINTAIN WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Whenever possible, disconnect after work, spend time with supportive people, participate in activities outside work, and use available vacation or recovery time.

LOOKING OUT FOR ONE ANOTHER

A strong safety culture means looking after coworkers. If a team member appears unusually withdrawn, frustrated, distracted, or overwhelmed, take time to check in respectfully. A simple question such as, “How are you doing?” can open the door to support. Supervisors should respond respectfully, focus on observable safety or work concerns, protect confidentiality, and connect the worker with the appropriate company resource. Supervisors are not expected to diagnose a medical or mental health condition.

FITNESS FOR DUTY

If stress is affecting your ability to work safely, stop and speak with your supervisor. Do not continue a safety-sensitive task when you cannot maintain the focus, judgment, or alertness required to perform it safely.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Stress is a normal response to challenges and demands. When it becomes chronic or overwhelming, it can affect health, well-being, communication, and workplace safety. Recognizing the signs early, reaching out for support, maintaining healthy habits, and looking out for coworkers help create a safer and healthier workplace for everyone.



ALBERTA UPDATES WEED CONTROL REGULATION TO TACKLE INVASIVE PLANT SPECIES

- SUBMITTED BY BY GAYAH SIEUSAHAI

Speaking at the Pest Management Association conference in Red Deer on February 24, 2026, Gayah Sieusahai; Pest Regulatory Officer with Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation, outlined recent updates to the ALBERTA WEED CONTROL REGULATION (WCR)—legislation that has guided weed management in the province for more than a century.

First enacted in 1907, the Weed Control Act was designed to protect agricultural productivity by preventing the introduction and spread of harmful plants. While the Act was last significantly modernized in 2010, the most recent regulatory review updated the provincial weed list in 2026 to reflect current ecological risks and scientific knowledge.

RECENT WEED REVIEW STRENGTHENS PROVINCIAL REGULATION

Alberta is reinforcing its long standing approach to weed and invasive plant management with updated regulations aimed at protecting agricultural land, waterways, and natural ecosystems across the province. With changing landscapes and increasing movement of people and goods, weed management is more important than ever. These updates ensure Alberta remains proactive, science based, and prepared for future challenges.

The provincial weed review process began in 2021 and concluded in 2022 after examining 75 regulated and 16 non regulated species. Stakeholder surveys and a multi agency Weed Review Committee helped shape the final updates.

NEW WEED LISTS REFLECT EMERGING RISKS

One of the most significant changes is the expansion of regulated weeds under provincial law. Alberta now classifies:

- **44 noxious weeds,** which are already present in the province and must be controlled to prevent further spread; and
- **51 prohibited noxious weeds**, which are either absent or found only in limited areas and are subject to eradication.

The update reflects growing concern over invasive plants that damage crops, displace native species, contribute to land erosion, and reduce property values. Some weeds are also toxic to livestock and pose risks to human health.

FOCUS ON EARLY DETECTION AND CONTAINMENT

The province's approach distinguishes between **containment** and **eradication**, depending on how widespread a species has become. For noxious weeds, the goal is to inhibit growth and spread. For prohibited noxious weeds, the requirement is full destruction—killing all growing parts and rendering reproductive material non viable.

This approach aligns with the internationally recognized INVASIVE SPECIES CURVE, which emphasizes early detection and rapid response as the most cost effective management strategy.

EXPANDED ROLE OF WEED INSPECTORS

Local authorities across Alberta are required to appoint qualified weed inspectors for both rural and urban areas. These inspectors play a central role in identifying regulated weeds, maintaining weed databases, evaluating control programs, and conducting enforcement when required.

continued page 12....



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Under the Act, inspectors have authority to:

- Enter land at reasonable hours
- Take plant samples
- Issue inspector or local authority notices
- Conduct follow up inspections
- Enter private dwellings with owner consent

Inspectors may issue mandatory notices for prohibited noxious weeds and discretionary notices for noxious weeds. Notices can require control measures, restrict land use, or authorize crop destruction under specific conditions.

NOTICES, APPEALS, AND ENFORCEMENT

The legislation establishes a structured enforcement framework that balances compliance with fairness. Landowners and occupants have the right to appeal inspector and local authority notices within defined timelines, with further review available through the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

Enforcement action is typically pursued only after non compliance and the expiry of appeal periods, with an emphasis on reasonable, practical solutions and cooperation with landowners.

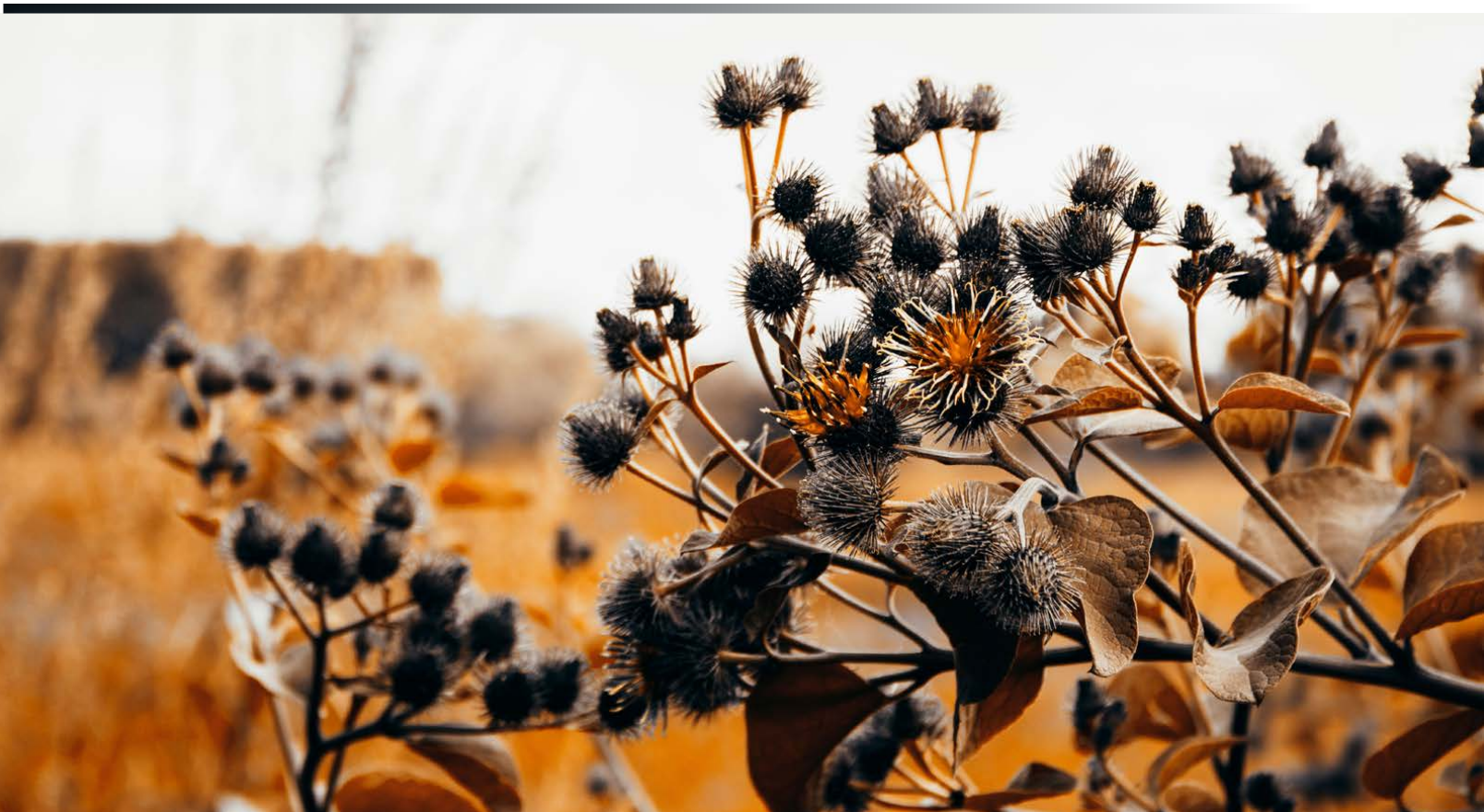
LOCAL BYLAWS AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Municipalities can pass bylaws to address weeds of local concern, including elevating a weed's status from noxious to prohibited noxious, subject to provincial approval. This allows communities to respond to regional risks while remaining aligned with provincial standards.

Responsibility under the Act extends to owners and occupants, including those managing railways, well sites, rights of way, and land down to the low water mark of water bodies.

LOOKING AHEAD

Future priorities include improved tools for managing herbicide resistant weeds, expanded use of biological controls, advances in targeted herbicides, and emerging technologies such as drones. The province is also updating communication materials, identification guides, factsheets, and online resources to support land managers and the public.





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UTT/UTW CERTIFICATION COURSES

Spring 2027 Classes

ONLINE LIVE LECTURE - APRIL 12-26, 2027

FIELD OPTION 1 - APRIL 19-23, 2027

FIELD OPTION 2 - APRIL 26-29, 2027

APPLICATIONS ARE DUE AT THE PVMA OFFICE NO LATER THAN:

MARCH 8, 2027

PRE-APPROVAL BY OUR OFFICE IS REQUIRED BEFORE BEING ENROLLED

RE-CERTIFICATION COURSE DATES:

ONLINE SELF-DIRECTED SESSIONS:

MARCH 8-19, 2027

APRIL 12-13, 2027

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APRIL 14-15, 2027

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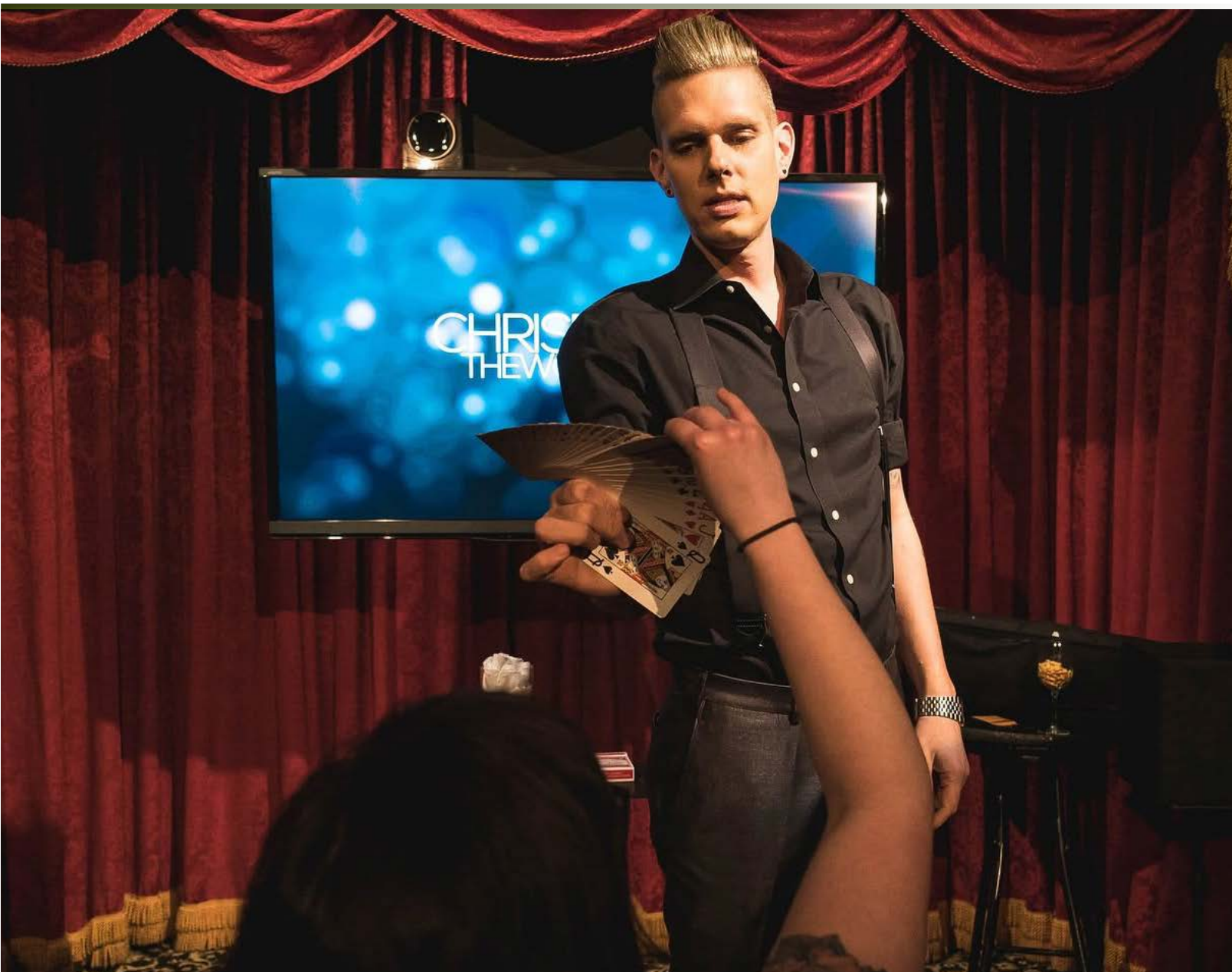
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PVMA 3-DAY SPRING CONFERENCE AND TRADESHOW

The PVMA Bi-Annual 3-day Spring Conference & Tradeshow will be at the River Cree Resort & Casino, February 23-25, 2027. 10 Sessions, 30 Exhibitors, and Banquet Entertainer Chris Funk the Wonderist.



PVMA'S SCHOLARSHIP, BURSARY, AND AWARD PROGRAMS

SCHOLARSHIPS:

The PVMA will be awarding up to five $2,000 scholarships each year to Alberta students who are enrolled in an Alberta Post Secondary Institute in a vegetation management-related program, OR in any program but have vegetation management work experience. In addition to the scholarship, the winners will be invited, with expenses paid, to our Spring Seminar.

Applications are accepted from September 1st to November 30th of each year.

KEITH SANFTLEBEN MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP:

Keith Sanftleben was an active member of the PVMA for many years and had a passion for helping other people and communities. This scholarship has been set up to honour his memory and to highlight students who have an interest in making a positive impact on the community and others. The PVMA will be awarding one $4,000 scholarship each year to a student enrolled in post-secondary study at an Alberta government-approved provincial, national, or international institution or program. $1,000 is funded by AdvantageVM, with the balance funded by the PVMA.

Applications are accepted from September 1st to November 30th of each year.

BURSARY:

The purpose of the bursary program is to recognize the scholastic achievement of dependents of members and to encourage them to enter an approved university or college course of study leading to a degree or diploma beyond the secondary school level.

Applications are accepted from January 1st to February 15th of each year.

AWARDS:

Larry Beaton Memorial Award | Honorary Membership Award | Past President Award

Visit our website for more informaion: https://www.pvma.ca/awards_scholarships_and_bursaries





THE VEGETATION MANAGER *magazine*

- 2027 ADVERTISING RATE SHEET

2027 RATE SHEET

* SUBMIT ADS OR INQUIRIES TO VAL@PVMA.CA

AD SIZE SPECS:	SINGLE ISSUE RATE (MEMBER)	ANNUAL RATE (MEMBER) * THREE Issues - One printed, Two digital (printable)
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HALF-PAGE ADVERTISEMENT	$550	$1155
QUARTER PAGE ADVERTISEMENT	$400	$840
BUSINESS CARD ADVERTISEMENT	$100	$210

*PLUS GST

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COMMITTEE REPORTS

- AWARDS/ELECTION COMMITTEE

We want to remind our members that their dependants who are in post-secondary are eligible to apply for a $500 PVMA Bursary, no matter what program they are enrolled in. No Essay is required. The application period for a Bursary is January 1-February 15th. Dependants are eligible to receive a Bursary more than once, if chosen.

Also, the application period to apply for a PVMA Student Scholarship or for the Keith Sanftleben Memorial Scholarship is now open with a deadline of November 30th. Certain criteria must be met to be eligible for a Scholarship. Criteria can be found on the pvma.ca website.
Application forms for both the Scholarships and the Bursaries are available on the pvma.ca website.

We have our elections coming up for the PVMA Board of Directors at our Annual General Meeting in February 2027. If you or someone you know is interested in being a part of the Board of Directors, please speak to myself, Bob Gordon, Joanne Ireland, or to someone in the PVMA office to be put on the ballot.

-Thane Beagle, Director in Charge

- MARKETING/PUBLIC RELATIONS

Although the summer has been slow for marketing opportunities, we have entered a busy season, this fall and winter. We were excited to once again attend the ISA Prairie Chapter's Fall Conference Tradeshow. It was hosted at the Edmonton Inn and Conference Centre October 19th to 21st. We will also have a booth at the Olds College Career Fair October 28th. It's never too early to start looking for those seasonal students. If you would like to be added to our job opportunity contact list, please reach out to Joanne at execdirector@pvma.ca. Follow PVMA on LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram for updates on upcoming events!

- Joanne Ireland, Committee Chair

- SAFETY COMMITTEE

The PVMA Safety Committee remains committed to promoting safety awareness across the vegetation management industry through the Safety Corner in the PVMA Magazine. Members are encouraged to share ideas, lessons learned, and topics that can help strengthen our collective safety culture. To suggest a topic or join the committee, please contact the PVMA Office.

- Peter Jecklin, Director in Charge

- GOVERNMENT LIAISON COMMITTEE

Drone Spraying: A New Era for Herbicide Application in Canada

Canada's agricultural industry is entering a new era in precision application, with recent regulatory changes opening the door for drones to be used for the application of certain pesticides and herbicides.

As of June 30, 2026, Health Canada has approved the use of aerial drones to apply pesticides that are already approved for conventional aerial application. Combined with recent changes to Canada's drone regulations, these developments create new opportunities for agricultural operators to explore more precise, efficient and targeted application methods.

However, the new opportunities also come with important requirements surrounding pilot certification, drone and operator requirements, application practices, product labels, airspace and safety. Understanding how these regulations apply in real-world agricultural spraying operations will be essential for anyone considering this technology.

The details will be explored at the PVMA Fall Meeting, where our presenter will provide an in-depth look at the new Canadian regulations, what they mean for herbicide application, and what operators need to know as this technology becomes more widely adopted.

- Jamie Wiltzen, Director in Charge

- EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

We hope you enjoy this latest issue of our magazine. It is the committee's goal to publish informative articles, as well as provide periodic updates on things happening both within the PVMA and within the broader vegetation management industry. There is always opportunity to advertise your company or product at very affordable prices. See our ad rate sheet for more information.

- Jamie Wiltzen, Director in Charge

- CASINO COMMITTEE

We are always looking at the best ways to spend our recent casino proceeds. When we can cover some of our regular operating costs from our Casino account that frees up general funds to cover some of our ongoing project costs, such as the UTW app, the trademark process, the designated trade process, and subsidizing several of our conferences.

- Thane Beagle, Director in Charge

- MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

We are so appreciative of the companies and individuals who continue to support the PVMA through membership. Your membership fees help us carry out our mission to provide vegetation management industries, related agencies and the public with communication and educational opportunities in the area of industrial vegetation management. We remind members that your post-secondary dependants can apply for a $500 Bursary. Application period is January 1-February 15th. Applications are available on our website.

- Jamie Wiltzen, Director in Charge

- SEMINAR COMMITTEE

For those who are attending our fall seminar October 27th, we hope you enjoy the change of venue to the Red Deer Resort and Casino, as well as the addition of a field training session at the Fortis Training Centre the day before. We're also excited to return to River Cree for our three-day biennial conference, **February 23–25, 2027** and planning is already underway. Keep an eye out for updates!

- Joanne Ireland, Committee Chair

- UTT-UTW BOARD OF GOVERNORS

The Board of Governors had contracted a company to develop a UTT-UTW App. The App is currently in initial testing and will eventually replace the paper tracking of hours and proficiencies for certification, as well as streamline the school approval and certification processes. Trade designation talks are still ongoing.

- Don Walters, Director in Charge

- NATIONAL/INDUSTRIAL COMMITTEE

I hope everyone made it through another spray season. Here is an update from associations from other parts of the country.

Atlantic Vegetation Management Association (AVMA)

- The Atlantic Vegetation Management Association continues to support vegetation management professionals across Atlantic Canada through education, technical information sharing, and industry collaboration.
- AVMA remains focused on promoting safe, effective, and environmentally responsible vegetation management practices and supporting engagement among utilities, contractors, forestry professionals, researchers, and regulators.
- Industry event listings indicate the next AVMA Conference and Annual General Meeting is scheduled for October 27 to 29, 2026.

Ontario Vegetation Management Association (OVMA)

- The Ontario Vegetation Management Association continues to promote safe and sustainable vegetation management across Ontario.
- OVMA supports collaboration among vegetation managers, suppliers, researchers, and government stakeholders while advancing regulatory compliance and industry best practices.
- The 2026 OVMA Conference & Field Day is scheduled for September 29 to October 1, 2026, in Walkerton, Ontario.

Integrated Vegetation Management Association of British Columbia (IVMA of BC)

- The Integrated Vegetation Management Association of British Columbia remains active in advancing integrated vegetation management through training, certification support, and professional development.
- Recent educational initiatives have included accredited webinars covering pesticide risk communication, invasive plant management, aquatic vegetation control, and equipment calibration.
- Forum discussions have highlighted emerging topics such as drone applications, digital vegetation management tools, invasive species mapping, and post-fire vegetation management strategies.

- Chris Johnson, Director in Charge



ATTRACTING, RECRUITING, AND RETAINING TALENT IN UTILITY VEGETATION MANAGEMENT:

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM A PVMA PANEL

- SUBMITTED BY BY JOANNE IRELAND



LEADERS FROM UTILITIES AND CONTRACTORS DISCUSSED WHY THE WORKFORCE GAP IS WIDENING—AND WHAT PRACTICAL STEPS CAN HELP BUILD A STRONGER, MORE CREDENTIALED VEGETATION MANAGEMENT WORKFORCE.

During the PVMA Spring Workshop held in Red Deer February 24, 2026, a panel of Alberta vegetation management leaders agreed: demand is rising, but certified, experienced workers are not. With higher regulatory expectations and greater storm-response and quality pressures, workforce development is now critical to safety, reliability, and operational continuity.

The panel featured Steve Kerr (FortisAlberta), Bob Collinge (ATCO Electric), Jesse Imbeault (Davey Tree), Kevin Tritten (Arbor-Tech), Brandon Tupper (Knight Spraying), and Mike Evoy (Ace Vegetation) and was moderated by Kimberly Laing (ArborMetrics; President-Elect, Utility Arborist Association)

WHY THE TALENT GAP IS BECOMING A RELIABILITY ISSUE

Laing framed the session around a widening resource gap across North America: not enough certified workers to deliver the scale of line-clearance, herbicide, inspection, and planning work required. Panelists agreed that the resulting bottlenecks show up everywhere—schedule pressure, reduced flexibility for storm work, higher training burden on the crews that do exist, and risk to consistent quality control. The message was simple: a skilled workforce is no longer “nice to have”; it is core infrastructure.

WHAT DRAWS PEOPLE IN—AND WHAT KEEPS THEM IN VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

When asked to share their career paths, panelists described different starting points—family legacy, seasonal

work, a job that "just happened," or a pivot from another field—but their stories converged on a few consistent themes: pride in outdoor work, year-round stability, visible career ladders, and mentors who pushed them toward the next certification or responsibility.

FROM ENTRY-LEVEL TO CERTIFIED: MENTORSHIP, ROADMAPS, AND CREDENTIALS

On the question of moving people from ground-level roles into certified positions, panelists emphasized that advancement needs to be visible and supported—especially for seasonal hires who may initially see work in vegetation management as "just a summer job." Organizations that succeed, they argued, make the roadmap explicit: where you can go next, what training is required, and who will help you get there.

- Normalize field-to-leadership progression: Several panelists noted that many leaders in vegetation management started in the field. Making that story explicit helps new hires see long-term opportunity.

- Mentorship is the multiplier: Mentors "dangling the carrot" toward the next certification—crew leads, supervisors, and experienced operators—were repeatedly cited as the most effective driver of growth.

- Credential programs build networks as well as skills: The Pro UVM program (University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point) was highlighted not only for coursework, but for the peer network and relationships that continue to support practitioners.

- Help seasonal workers picture a career: Panelists stressed the importance of early coaching for students and summer hires, so they understand the breadth of roles available across contractors, utilities, and specialties (spraying, mechanical work, patrol, planning, Quality Assurance).

WHAT INDUSTRY ORGANIZATIONS CAN DO: VISIBILITY, UNITY, AND EARLY OUTREACH

When the conversation shifted to the role of associations (including PVMA, UVMA, and UAA), panelists were blunt: the industry must do a better job promoting itself. Many practitioners only discovered the vegetation management industry by chance or through family connections, despite the fact that the work underpins public safety and grid reliability—and was treated as an essential service during COVID-era disruptions.

- Recruit earlier: Show up where forestry, environmental, and related students already are—career fairs, guest lectures, and university programs—so the "utility forestry" pathway is visible before graduates choose another industry.

- Tell the essential-service story: Position vegetation management as critical infrastructure work with clear public value, not a niche trade hidden behind powerlines.

- Unify the message: Speakers called for closer alignment across associations and regions to strengthen recognition, standards, and a shared public narrative.

- Plan for future skills: Looking 5–10 years ahead, the panel urged the industry to define the skills the next generation will need, then build training and professional development backward from that target.

RETENTION BEYOND WAGES: CULTURE, FLEXIBILITY, AND GROWTH

While compensation matters, panelists repeatedly returned to a broader retention formula: meaningful advancement opportunities, a strong company culture, and flexibility that reflects changing workforce expectations. Several noted that newer workers prioritize work-life balance more openly than past generations, and companies that adapt—through scheduling practices, supportive supervision, and non-wage incentives—are more likely to keep talent.

CONTRACTOR ONBOARDING AND QA: STANDARDS PLUS RELATIONSHIPS

From the utility perspective, onboarding and quality assurance have become more structured and more procurement driven. Panelists referenced third-party platforms and prequalification processes that review contractor certifications, safety programs, and claims

performance before field work begins. But they also stressed that formal screening is only one part of QA: trust is built by being present in the field, understanding how crews actually work, and maintaining two-way communication so expectations stay aligned.

TECHNOLOGY AND TRAINING: EMBRACE THE TOOLS, BUT KEEP THE WORK GROUNDED

Technology emerged as both a productivity driver and a retention risk if introduced poorly. Panelists acknowledged that new work-management systems can be frustrating and that adoption rarely happens "on the clock" alone—people need time, support, and a clear explanation of why the tools matter. Several speakers described practical ways to reduce friction: screening for baseline tech aptitude during hiring, showing employees where data goes and who uses it, and pairing tech-comfortable younger workers with experienced veterans so each teaches the other.

- Start with the "why": Adoption improves when crews understand how data supports planning, response, compliance, and safety.

- Create safe spaces to learn: Brandon Tupper described internal "AI sandboxes" that let employees quickly retrieve information like herbicide details, safety data sheets (SDS), and grazing restrictions.

- Centralize information: Reducing "where do I find it?" confusion—by consolidating data and standard workflows—cuts daily frustration.

- Digitize safety documentation thoughtfully: Steve Kerr described a more audio/record-based approach to tailboards and incident planning that reduces paperwork and discourages "pencil whipping."

- Use field-friendly apps: Panelists and audience members referenced mapping tools (e.g., Avenza Maps) and plant/tree/weed identification apps as practical supports for training and execution.

- Avoid over-tech paralysis: The panel emphasized that tools should guide field work—not replace it. "A saw still has to hit a tree; herbicide still has to hit vegetation."

ACTIONABLE TAKEAWAYS

- Make career paths visible: Show new hires what "next" looks like—skills, certifications, and timelines—so vegetation management is seen as a profession, not a stopgap job.

- Invest in mentorship on purpose: Treat mentoring as part of the work, not an informal extra, and recognize the leaders who develop others.

- Recruit where the talent already is: Build consistent presence in universities, colleges, and related programs to introduce vegetation management early.

- Retain with culture and flexibility: Pair competitive pay with schedules and supports that respect work-life balance.

- Use technology to reduce friction: Standardize workflows, train to competency, and keep tools grounded in field realities.

- Strengthen the industry narrative: Promote vegetation management as essential infrastructure work that protects communities and keeps the lights on.

ACROSS EVERY TOPIC—CREDENTIALS, CULTURE, TECHNOLOGY, OR OUTREACH—THE PANEL RETURNED TO THE SAME IDEA: WORKFORCE CHALLENGES WILL NOT BE SOLVED BY ONE LEVER. PROGRESS COMES FROM MANY SMALL, CONSISTENT IMPROVEMENTS: CLEARER ROADMAPS, STRONGER MENTORSHIP, BETTER STORYTELLING, AND TOOLS THAT MAKE FIELD WORK SAFER AND MORE EFFICIENT. DONE TOGETHER, THOSE STEPS CAN HELP CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN GROWING VEGETATION MANAGEMENT DEMAND AND THE SKILLED PEOPLE NEEDED TO DELIVER IT.





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