

## The Junior Forest Warden History

The seeds of Junior Forest Wardens were planted in the 1920s when a group of young boys reported a forest fire to a Forest Ranger in British Columbia. Their story was published in *Forests and Outdoors* magazine, the official publication of the Canadian Forestry Association. The response to the story was incredible. Boys from across British Columbia contacted the author wondering how they could help their local rangers.

In response to the inquiries along with the mounting forest fire toll, the local manager from the Canadian Forestry Association, Charles Wilkinson, decided to teach youth about forest protection and established the warden program. By 1930, 300 boys in the province were involved in the warden program.

Known until 1932 as the Junior Fire Wardens, Mayor W.H. Malkin appointed the first Warden in a ceremony at Aberdeen School in Vancouver. At this point, there were no uniforms, only bronze badges. The red shirt, which is still worn by wardens today, was not introduced until 1934.

The JFW movement continued to grow and in 1931 a tree was planted in Stanley Park, Vancouver, with soil collected by Wardens from every part of British Columbia. That tree stands today as a living and growing symbol of the JFW movement.

In 1942 Charles Wilkinson offered Bill Myring the job of touring British Columbia lecturing on conservation and organizing Junior Forest Warden Clubs. Bill was appointed "Chief Warden of British Columbia" in 1944. When the program came to Alberta, Bill Myring was appointed "Chief Warden of Canada" a position he held continuously from that date until his death in 1989. Ken Kelsey held the position from 1990 – 2000. Dave Cullen from British Columbia currently holds this position.

The Girl Forest Guards were organized as an associate group of the Junior Forest Wardens in 1944 in answer to the requests of the sisters of Junior Forest Wardens. In 1974 the two groups were merged under the Junior Forest Warden banner.

In 1961 the late Honourable Norman Willmore noticed the activities of the Junior Forest Wardens in British Columbia and personally sought to have the Alberta Government sponsor a similar program. The Honourable Norman Willmore, on behalf of the government of Alberta, officially accepted the Alberta Charter on February 16, 1962, during a meeting of the Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents of the Alberta Forest Service.

The first "Chief Warden in Alberta" was Terry Whitely (1960 - 1967). Other "Chief Wardens" in Alberta have been: George Brewster (1967 - 1979), Bill Bresnahan (1980 - 1995), Jim Skrenek (1995- 1996), Bob Young (1996). During Bob Young's tenure, the Chief Warden became a separate position from the provincial coordinator. The position is awarded to a volunteer whom is elected by the provincial association. Ernst Klaszus was the first volunteer to hold position of Alberta's Chief Warden from 1998 to 2007. Upon his retirement, he was given the title Chief Warden Emeritus by the AJFWA Provincial Board, and Terry Garrett was appointed Chief Warden in April 2007.

A central office in Hinton, operating through a network of Alberta Forest Service Ranger Stations, first carried out the administration of the program throughout the province.

Today, many employees in both the Department of Sustainable Resource Development and the Forestry and Natural Resource Industries have received their first exposure to the natural sciences through the Junior Forest Warden program. In 1985, the program was updated to provide wardens with additional opportunities in the areas of Forestry, Ecology, Outdoor Skills and Leadership.