Though there may be a range of opinions when it comes to bovine tuberculosis (Tb), Farmer and RM Councilor of Grandview Jack Squance sums up the best way to take action: “The only way its going to work is if everyone’s on one side, working together.”

On Monday June 22nd, Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve (RMBR) held a field trip for the local committee of The Bovine Tuberculosis Stakeholders Advisory Committee (TbSAC). TbSAC is a multi-stakeholder advisory committee formed in 2003. Some of the stakeholders besides RMBR include The Manitoba Cattle Producers Association, The Riding Mountain Outfitters Association and Parks Canada. While each agency and group is governed by its particular mandate, they are collaborating and cooperating to implement disease surveillance, eradication, and prevention measures directed at bovine TB in both agricultural animals and wildlife. The local committee is made of farm operators, outfitters and tourism and business operators in the Rural Municipalities of Grandview and Rossburn. The goal of this committee is to improve communications of accurate information on Bovine Tb and its management, facilitate local engagement and collaboration and to provide advice Riding Mountain National Park regarding the Bovine Tb Management Program.

The meeting began with a tour and explanation of strategically burned areas in the Lake Audy area located in the West side of Riding Mountain National Park, led by Stephen Cornelson, Resource Management Specialist in Charge of Fire Management. He explained how strategic burning affects the land, which in turn can affect the population of free-roaming elk (some have been found to be infected with the agent of bovine tuberculosis). Mycobacterium bovis bacteria causes the contagious
disease. Cattle, bison, deer, elk, goats and other species including humans, can get the disease. Symptoms include lesions in the lungs, lymph nodes and other tissue as well as weight loss and general deterioration. Bovine Tb is chronic and eventually leads to death.

“We want to keep all species, plants and animals healthy” says Cornelson. “Fire plays a significant role in healthy habitats.”

The Manitoba Tb Task Group is responsible for the design and delivery of a program that deals with bovine Tb in wildlife and the wildlife-livestock interface in the Riding Mountain Ecosystem. Riding Mountain National Park is the only national park to be surrounded so heavily by farmland. Bovine Tb is costly to the hunting and guiding industry, the livestock industry, creates trade barriers and is a human health threat.

Teren Garlinski, who has run a cull calf operation with 800 cows in Grandview for the past fifteen years, explains that he attended the meeting to learn about steps being taken to “prevent Tb problems from getting out of hand. I want a first hand look at what’s happening.”

This group receives advice from the Scientific Review Committee whose role it is to provide scientific advice on the management of the Tb Program.

Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve is a special area within which people are encouraged to demonstrate better approaches to conservation and sustainable resource use. The core-protected area, Riding Mountain National Park, covers some 3,000 square kilometers of mixedwood forest, eastern deciduous forest, and rough fescue prairie. RMBR also includes a Zone of Cooperation, which consists of the 15 municipalities that surround the Park, comprising an additional 12,000 square kilometers.