Since 1956, Cruickshank has worked hard to become one of the best road builders and aggregate producers in the industry — so you might be surprised to learn that for the past four summers, Cruickshank West Inc. (CWI) has been helping the Alberta Ministry of Sustainable Resources and Development (ASRD) battle forest fires in the Lac La Biche region of Alberta.

You wouldn’t normally think of a road builder as a firefighter, but thanks to CWI’s ability to think outside the box, ASRD can depend on Cruickshank to provide a vital service for the province — road building equipment and trained operators to construct fire breaks, supply water and transport supplies.

One of the firefighting operators is David McDonald, CWI’s Project Manager. When working with the ASRD, he is a Crew Superintendent, a job that involves supervising the bulldozer drivers who knock down trees, push trees away from a fire and create paths for other firefighters to get to the fire sites. “I got involved with this work because I like the excitement of a big fire, but also because I know we’re providing a valuable service to our community,” he says. McDonald has been helping the ASRD fight fires for about twenty years.

In addition to clearing trees and making paths, CWI uses its water trucks and Nodwells (all-terrain vehicles) to transport water to fire areas. “We’d normally use these vehicles to move water to lease areas or build access roads,” says McDonald, “but we know these trucks can be put to good use in a forest fire situation, and we’re happy to do that for the ASRD.”

The ASRD has one of its command centres in Lac La Biche and CWI is also located there — so when the fire risk is high, CWI’s operators are on-call, which means they can be one of the quickest groups to respond to a forest fire.

Although it may seem strange that CWI offers firefighting support to the Province of Alberta, it’s not strange to David McDonald and the crews he works with. “We’re adaptable and we have the equipment and manpower to do this kind of work; the ASRD knows it — they have looked to some of us to provide this kind of service for over a decade.”

It’s this dependability and CWI’s talent for finding creative solutions to complex problems that has attracted the ASRD to CWI year after year. And it’s strong relationships like these that make the Lac La Biche region a safer place to live.