

# Bighorn Backcountry Standing Committee

## Meeting Summary

Bighorn Backcountry Access Management

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January 30, 2020 @ 9:00 **FINAL COPY**

### In Attendance

Lisa Schrader	Lesley Peterson	Adena Earl	Travis Earl
Anne Hubbs	Marla Zapach	Donald James Turner	Kristofer Heemeryck
Michel Doyle	Dennis Schafer	Doug King	Alan Ernst
Loyal Ma	Dominik Kmet	Rick Smith	Morgan Titford
Jim Duncan	Rod Burns	Dale Marshall	Barry Wesley
Don Livingston	Lisa Jackson	John Tchir	Wayne Crocker
Jamie Bruha	Rick Artzen	Andrea McMillan	Grant Santo
Alice Wan	Morgan Titford	Rod Burns	

### Chair

John Tchir

## Welcome/Introduction

Dominik Kmet is the new alternate for Mountain Biking, Rick Smith (YaHa Tinda Ranch) and Alice Wan (BNP Planning) are the rep and alternate for Banff National Park as it borders the majority of the Bighorn Backcountry to the west with many trails entering the Park, particularly in the south.

## James Pass Update

AEP met with Bighorn members at the James pass proposed re-route multiple times to review development and maintenance needs from the parking lot at Eagle staging to James Lake. Also looked at a trail rerouting option to the south side of James River. We are going through the approval process, First Nations consultation, wildlife and historical resources. First window for work is July 1, 2020 to Aug 22, 2020, weather dependant. Letters were sent to three First Nations, working with Culture on historical resources.

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More on Bighorn Backcountry trail monitoring: <https://www.alberta.ca/bighorn-backcountry-monitoring.aspx>

Why can work not start until July? Wildlife – The timing window of July 1 to August 22 is associated with a key wildlife biodiversity zone. Timing restriction associated with bighorn sheep, fisheries, and wildlife corridors. Is our construction season considered industrial? Talking internally about the classification.

First Nations – When were the letters sent? On Monday of this week. Letters are sent to one main contact out of Morley and then he distributes it from there. First Nations - Barry Wesley is now the new head of consultation for the Bighorn. As a side note, Barry would like to do a Stoney cultural awareness workshop for this group. It is time we connect and communicate.

**Action: Andrea McMillan – Will send info on James Pass direct to Barry Wesley.**

**Action: Follow-up with Barry Wesley to determine what he has in mind for the proposed workshop and potential timing, cost etc.**

## Eagle Lake Timing Restriction

AEP has had requests to relook at the OHV timing restriction from Eagle Lake staging to Eagle Lake. Currently, as of Feb 1<sup>st</sup> it goes to snowmobile only. In the last year there has been increased ice fishing, and ice climbing is getting really popular. Because there is not much snow, could it be OHV and snowmobile both to the lake until April 30? This is for the designated Eagle Lake trail only, not any of the surrounding area trails.

Winter Motorized – Snow conditions haven't really been good there the last few years. There are issues with winter trails leading into deeper snow and the snow bowls, which would lead to rutting. Around the ranch to the summit was never OHV. - No concerns from winter motorized representative.

Summer Motorized - If the snow conditions permit and you've got tires in there...it should be one or the other.

Here it's pretty rocky and there's usually not enough snow to run a sled.

No negative feedback around the room on the timing change.

Based on what we have heard we will proceed to Steering with that change – light purple, closed May/June

**\*UPDATE – Timing restriction change brought back to the Bighorn Backcountry Steering Committee with no input to the contrary. Update will be included on the 2020 Bighorn Backcountry PLUZ brochure.**

## Trout Unlimited Canada Presentation

\*Copy of presentation info attached

Priorities are guided by the four themes. There are a variety of programs today about conservation and restoration. Bull trout is of highest interest in this region. See presentation for historical threats, current and future.

The North Saskatchewan River and Red Deer River basins are high priority. High priority areas have been selected in these watersheds for focussing efforts to work with partners. A lot of the work is hands on rehabilitation. Trying to restore ecological process and function.

One example of the type of work is at Four Mile Creek in the Ghost PLUZ – easy access, simple process to fix. Area looked like a trail, was being used as a trail but wasn't supposed to be (not a designated trail) and was causing issues with the creek. Erosion was causing water and sediment to flow down into the creek. We first addressed the compaction issue, then had a workshop with the Ghost Watershed Alliance. Planted willows to speed up recovery of that area. Left holes to collect water allowing sediment to settle, leaving cleaner water flowing into the creek.

Would any of the groups be interested in becoming involved with the work and having a presentation? There is [funding available](#) for this work.

Q – The list of threats didn't include hydro dams? Particularly the alternation of flows. TU - It is lumped into the habitat section. We haven't worked with Transalta directly in a while, we have in the past and would be open to having a conversation with them.

Time needed for a project? This project shown took place over two days, volunteer time was one day.

First Nations - Was the Stoney Nation approached on this? Unsure, but will give each other our contacts.

## Peppers Lake Trails

This subject of sustainability of the Peppers Lake trails is coming up again. Trout Unlimited has gone in and looked at some of the trails just north of Peppers Creek and it's looking pretty bad. We are thinking about changing the designation from both summer and winter to just winter. Until we can move that trail up onto the bench we need to change the timing of usage. Thoughts?

Staging/Trails – Wont that just move people to another spot? Don't destroy anymore. Summer Motorized – If you put a timeline and put a closed for reconstruction informational sign people will generally respect that . Summer Motorized – For being open for winter only if we are looking for a reroute.

Mountain Biking – agree with Summer Motorized that using a sign to explain would be helpful.

Mostly needs to be brought up onto the ridge and rerouting a few spots. Need to do some planning to see if its one mile or four miles or more that need rerouting.

With the comments taken today, moving to Steering for winter motorized only – light purple, OHV and snowmobile: Dec 1 – April 30.

Does Parks manage the road all the way along from Peppers Lake to the trunk road? Will there be no OHVs on the road? Parks portion would be no. Other part is the LOC portion.

**\*UPDATE** – Timing restriction change brought back to the Bighorn Backcountry Steering Committee with no input to the contrary. Update will be included on the 2020 Bighorn Backcountry PLUZ brochure.

### **Bighorn Priorities**

At the Break – Would like your input again this year by putting 5 votes each on the priority wishlist. Results attached to this summary.

## Gravel & Manure Disposal Issues

Discussion revolved around issues with FOESA needing gravel for projects and disposing of manure. Gravel - As the department receives funding we are going to buy gravel directly from Alberta Transportation for stockpiling at various locations. Manure – The department will speak with Alberta Transportation about storing manure at some of their gravel pits. When they reclaim these pits, we will have to take some of the responsibility. For manure at Eagle it would cost more to haul to the Panther site. We will have to figure out where Eagle manure will go. The issue with County pits is County cannot sell gravel, we would have to give it away.

**Action: Wayne Crocker- Firm up with Alberta Transportation where manure will go.**

If other user groups need gravel, do they approach Wayne for this as well? Yes

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More on Bighorn Backcountry trail monitoring: <https://www.alberta.ca/bighorn-backcountry-monitoring.aspx>

Equestrian – This is disposal after it's gone from the campgrounds? Right, it's still going to be the one big collection pile and then hauled from there. Equestrian – At Hummingbird you have to haul all the way to the end, opportunity for finding another spot?

**Action: Wayne Crocker - Look at another spot for manure at Hummingbird.**

## Prescribed Fire Update

There really isn't much to update. Last summer was fairly wet so unable to burn. Parts of Wapiabi, Chungo, Ram, Upper Clearwater and Bighorn Creek are all still on the books. Do not know what we are going to be able to do this coming season as we are unsure of funding. Wild Sheep Foundation and has approached wanting to be involved for some habitat burning.

## Summary 2019/2020 Priorities

\*Copy of list attached.

Also have started the discussion of OHV use on LOC roads, including pieces of the trunk road and river crossings. Currently working through that with Alberta Transportation. The conversations with Transportation have been very positive so far.

Hiking issue asked to bring forward – Conflicts regarding use of trails in Shunda Meadows at Nordegg. It's a non-motorized multi-use trail. Sounds like the xcountr skiers have taken over the trail and are not wanting other non-motorized users on it because they are setting tracks. Which brings up the issue of motorized use to set tracks. We need to have a conversation about this with the hiking reps regarding multiuse and also illegal motorized use.

**Action: Wayne Crocker to speak with Hiking reps**

Planning – Canmore has an example on how to work through the multiuse issue.

Mountain Biking - Bubbles have become a social media phenomena. There has been mountain bikes on Abraham Lake and pictures are going viral. Are we at the point of posting signs that this ice is not stable? Tchir - We don't do any assessments on lake ice, trail safety, etc. and the water table itself it under Transalta. The open hole area is Transalta's. It is a problem but I'm not sure it's something for this table.

First Nations – There are so many people there out on the ice, and it is a concern. There are still some Stoney graves underneath there where some of the bubbles are. First Nations approached tourism about it but they didn't want to listen. The graves are always under water even at low water, but would like to have it cordoned off. Safety concerns are very high there.

Planning – At the Royal Alberta Museum they had an 8 min documentary about the Bighorn Dam and the Stoney history.

## Trails Act / OHV / Camping Trailer Fee

This discussion is at a stage of “what is it you need a Trails Act to do and not to do?” Putting out feelers on having an OHV fee and applying a \$30 fee for campers and camping trailers. Who should a fee apply to? Is that enough? Too much? How to distribute it?

Trails Act – GOA said they would create a Trails Act, what would you like it to do? Staging/Trails – The Trails Guide <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/b1cae0e7-4b70-4c7b-8575-f89ada15342d> just sent out this summer to the Bighorn Backcountry Committee is pretty good and covered anything.

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County - Trails Act would be an enabling legislation – how would it all fit together? Planning – If you want it to designate trails outside of the PLUZ, a trails act could be “the public lands act needs the clauses changed to this”, etc. and could change and clarify which definitions would follow.

Staging / Trails – Changes to the Public Lands Act would have to go specific, area by area. Planning - That is what is currently missing in the Public Lands Act. Currently no protection for infrastructure outside of the PLUZ. The Trails Act could include a mechanism on public land to protect the trail itself.

Trail Planning – A trails act would not specifically identify trails rather enable a process to designate and protect a trail. The process could involve multi-stakeholder groups like the BSC and would happen after the trails act work is complete.

Summer Motorized – If people were asked to submit their trails they want included, you are going to have a major amount of submissions. Trail proposals should be evaluated based on if a trail is sustainable and how much it will cost to maintain. This evaluation should be done with the user groups.

Planning – Need a process to have groups work together and submit input into the planning of a trail system. Pretty much all of the provinces in Canada have some type of recreational trails act. Every one has a user pay system.

There is a desire for multi-use and publicly accessible trails. But there is also a desire for trails that you can designate for a specific recreational user – such as snowmobile or cross-country ski trails.

An OHV fee and a camping trailer fee – should it just be a camping fee? Mountain Biking – Paying an annual fee with registration would not work because currently when you buy the plate for the trailer that’s it for the lifetime of that trailer. Some other provinces have a fee with the registration and then a fee for the permit.

OHV Fees – There is a concern around double charging or taxing ATV/snowmobile users charging (having to pay for both the registration and a public lands fee).

OHV Fees – Some members suggested a willingness to pay a 25\$/day pass, like in BC for groomed snowmobile trails. \$30/year is not enough for the maintenance of trails. Who will spend this money? Funds should go to the user groups who are more efficient at spending these dollars.

What we are asking is would the fee be meaningful at \$30 each to maintain the trails. Would you like to see it granted back to the user groups? What if it was like a park pass? Planning - The GOA wants more partnership with user groups like yourselves.

Equestrian – To go through Banff National Park you need a permit. Why not have anyone using facilities in the west country having to have a pass? Planning - Right now they say charge OHV and camping fee? Should this apply to everyone? Yes!

What about province wide fee and maybe options for discounts for some users e.g. seniors discounts.

Camping Trailer Fee – Introducing a fee for random camping could help existing campground operators (for better balance between paid camping and unpaid random camping).

Summer Motorized - User groups invest their hours, could these hours worked not be put forth for payment?

Mountain Biking – Wherever you buy the permit goes back to the park you purchased it at? Another suggestion included having the user select which provincial organization they would like to direct their funds to.

First Nations – When it comes to charging a fee, you cannot charge me a fee to practice my indigenous rights. Planning – Indigenous and Metis peoples would be exempt from this fee..

Tent camping? Any random camping costs someone somewhere. Planning - should this apply to all campers front country and back?

Equestrian - Ability to have OHVs on LOC roads could be made part of this legislation.

Mountain Biking – Adding more trails adds complexity to enforcement? Build the system where it has the most effectiveness.

County – A lot of people are going places here because nobody else goes there. You may drive people out of those areas if you try to build facilities up.

Management of fee – many organizations exist, how to allocate funding? Maybe provincial organizations could decide how to redistribute funds to active volunteer groups. Would you want your trail pass fee to go to a certain group? Could you get money towards your volunteer time? Parts of the funding would go to enforcement. Search and rescue? That's volunteer time too.

Right now putting forth an OHV fee. Put it to public land fee? Should this apply to the non-motorized user? Facilities are there for everyone so yes. Hiking, for example, should be treated the same. A trail user fee and a camping fee.

First Nations – There are a few concerns based on the elders comments regarding Bighorn Dam. When you cross the dam there are old homesteads and cemeteries. If you are accessing that area, help keep those areas protected and in good shape. Next is the wild horses. They are part of our lives as Stoney people who have a connection with them. We would like to manage them as well and would like a connection for that. The trails we use are our ancestors' trails and thank you for maintaining them. We would like the children to be able to see the Stoney trails as they used to be. Last year I mentioned a Stoney map and that is still ongoing. Bubbles issue is a concern. Since the signs went up on the powerline there has been less disturbance from OHVs going onto the reserve. Please pass along to your groups to be respectful.

## User Group Updates / Out of PLUZ / Open Floor

Staging / Trails – FOESA – outhouses going in, possible expansion to Eagle campground. Larry's term is up so we are unsure who will get voted in. Banquet is Feb 15<sup>th</sup>.

Trapping – Regarding communications one concern is dealing with history. Concerned with what the future of trapping is going to be. West Fraser has been cooperative to a point as far as trail damage, but areas can be improved as far as communication about what is going on along the eastern slopes.

**Action: Rod Burns to connect with trappers that trap within the Bighorn to bring back their information to the Bighorn Committee.**

County – Partner on the Rail Trail, involvement with CTI, and meadows is a focus. Process with approvals has been an arduous one. Attending a Central Alberta Tourism workshop, trying to promote the tourism aspect from Central Alberta. Looking for trails they can promote. This has always been a problem outside of the PLUZ to promote anything, as many are non-designated trails.

Summer Motorized - Outside PLUZ, we have a TFA now for brushing. Getting the TFA is a very daunting process and Environment & Parks has been accommodating in helping. Interests are within and outside of the PLUZ. Need to work together or damage will be so great that we won't recover. Want to look at expanding trails in and outside of the PLUZ. Would like to look at some trail realignments to get some trails out of the creeks.

Banff National Park (YaHa Tinda) – Looking forward to becoming more involved and hearing what's happening, the group's work is fascinating. Item of note for my area, the amount of horses around the ranch has become astronomical.

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Mountain Biking – In 2012 we started grooming fat bike trails and primarily focussed outside of PLUZ. Have had conflicts with packer (snow grooming) groups. In that timeframe the area has become a destination to snowshoe, xcountry ski and fat bike around the west country. Thanks to Parks for packing the trail around Crimson Lake so regularly, many have commented about it. People are respecting more where the xcountry trail is and not ruining it.

Eco Tourism – Still the same problems, parking on and off the highway, garbage, human waste, trail head signage, minimal trail maintenance on non-motirized trails. The trail of concern is on Vision Quest, it needs maintenance on the switchbacks. Would like to see some funding from fees to do all that. Would like to see a user-pay system to contribute to that. Feel we've been operating as "horse before the cart" in that there are operations promoting the area big time and resulting in a lot of pressure in this area. How to deal with the growth in people and the continued growth in the future? If Tourism Alberta is driving people to this area we really need to meet expectations. We are falling short and find we are not meeting the expectations for the area.

Comment: The Central Alberta Tourism Alliance – stated infrastructure needs to be in place BEFORE marketing to the world.

Equestrian – Increased trail riding around YaHa Tinda, I believe what's going on is people are doing the small loops resulting in the braiding etc. There are more rigs going out there but they aren't riding as far. More and more people are not doing the longer rides. Central areas, we need to provide more facilities. Panther wagon staging – differing opinions – can discuss access.

**Action: Lisa Schrader/Don Livingston – Discuss Panther wagon staging area access with Doug King**

Summer Motorized – Received a grant for the Bighorn Dam and the grant plus an extension was approved. Getting out there again to take a look and will be going to check that trail before it opens. Drained the end of the McMullen trail and it worked very well.

Winter Motorized – Involved in the layout work on James Lake trail. On the trail into 40 Mile and up the new Forbidden it looks like a couple of fire guards have been put in, possible random sledding areas?

**Action: Put on agenda for next meeting**

**Action: Wayne Crocker - Look at access into Ranger Creek**

Guides & Outfitters – Regarding the Terms of Reference, wanted more reference to reflect the larger area outside of the PLUZ. Observations: Predation, grizzlies, wolves and cougars have had a significant impact on the elk.

Banff National Park (planning) – Interested in hearing about trans-boundary relations. We are in a parks management process and there will be the opportunities to hear about what is happening soon that will effect the whole area.

Fixed Commercial – Would like to reinforce preparedness. We go out to Siffleur regularly to do maintenance and notice signage that has been added, and that has helped. Would like to see more. See the usage of the outhouses and garbages, need more. Nordegg is a ghosttown in winter, knife and axe throwing events and dog training event.

\*Many spoke support for the indigenous training that First Nations mentioned.

Question on what is happening on Klein Lake – intent is to remove the dam, bull trout are upstream and downstream of the structure. At this point the intent is to return it to its natural state.

**Next Meeting Date – THURSDAY, JUNE 4, 2020**