

Bighorn Standing Committee

Meeting Summary

Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan

October 3, 2019 @ 9:00 FINAL COPY

Rocky Mountain House Museum

In Attendance

Adena Earl	Grant Santo	Laura Raivio	Michael Doyle
Alan Ernst	Jay Mills	Lisa Jackson	Morgan Titford
Andrea McMillan	Jim Duncan	Lisa Schrader	Rita Stagman
Dale Marshall	Julia Wachowski	Logan Van Imschoot	Travis Earl
Dennis Schafer	John Tchir	Lorne Hindbo	Wayne Crocker
Doug King	Kevin Gagne	Loyal Ma	
Ernst Bergmann	Larry Frischke	Maria Zapach	

Chair

John Tchir

Welcome/Introduction

Round table conducted. Julia Wachowski has replaced Chiara Feder as the wildlife biologist on the steering committee. Morgan Titford has replaced Tom Davidson as the alternate summer motorized representative on the standing committee.

Discussion of concerns and recommendations

Dale Marshall sent a letter to the Minister which was shared with the standing and steering committees. This letter contained points that we would like to address. We want to reiterate that everyone has the right to contact the Minister, Premier etc. on their own. We want to ensure that what is brought to this table at the Bighorn Backcountry Standing Committee meetings is not personal representation but rather the communities and sectors that you are representing. We are all responsible to bring information back to our perspective sectors after meetings, and ensure that we represent our sectors and communities at the meetings.

Dale had asked that some of the main points be expressed from the letter sent from Dale Marshall to the Minister dated Sept 23, 2019, and additional points for resolution discussions about what can be done, or what had already been done to address these items prior to the letter being sent:

- **Gravel:** When out at the Panther PLRA with government representatives, there were verbal approvals to do expansion and it was stated we need gravel. Obtained 400 yards for the south and 400 yards for the north but need more to do the staging area. Used to be able to just phone Clearwater County and get it but not for this amount. Clearwater County – Panther area is getting down to just a couple of pits in the area. There is an old pit there but there is complications as it is under disposition to Alberta Transportation in Calgary.
- **Manure Removal:** FOESA is looking into another old gravel pit to dispose of manure at the Panther. Looking at an old gravel pit near Hummingbird as well and will be speaking with Approvals. We don't have the same liberties as we used to. It's not a simple as area staff saying you can put it in the gravel pit of another disposition holder, and then they would have to turn around and tell them they have to remove the weeds. FOESA – contacted Saunders for the Sunset manure pit. They said AEP was after them. It was clarified that Approvals is not after them, it was a review and they were told that they would be responsible for the weed removal upon reclamation. Tchir said that Approvals will work with Alberta Transportation and FOESA because it's not a FOESA problem, it's ours collectively. Bighorn campground is the biggest concern, FOESA will be in touch with Approvals.
- **Camping, additional staging spot for Panther:** Dale out with government representatives and indicated he basically got verbal approvals. FOESA needs to apply for a Temporary Field Authorization (TFA). Once they apply it can be given for up to a year. Tchir - Approvals indicated this should be a quick turn around. This area will become part of the existing PLRA. Will have to get additional signage for that section as well. Equestrian – still uncomfortable that the wagon trail connector was the road. Looked at the trail through the trees from the proposed staging to the new crossing initially, is that still a possibility? AEP is receiving conflicting priorities. For the staging area, equestrian is wondering how many people are going to be using the new staging area and are they still having to use the road? Equestrian representatives and FOESA need to discuss and decide on their priorities, then get approval for that. FOESA - Maintenance on that wagon trail will need a budget as it's not as low maintenance as it was it to be.
- **Eagle Creek PLRA:** looking at creating new campsites. No concerns, just an update.
- **7 Mile open up for OHV access and repairs to cook shelter:** Minister suggested to FOESA to get a disposition for 7 Mile and other campsites they take over. Still want to get OHVs in there to make the site more usable. Discussing cook shelter with Parks.
- **Ram Falls:** Seniors have long walk to the outhouse that could be a simple fix of pulling a post to be able to drive up there. Would like to have the camping facility be multi-use. There could be a spot for campers only, have a loop for OHVs, have a loop for equestrian. We walked through in the past and would like it brought up again. Tchir - AEP sees the potential there for connectivity. Possible to make it so each loop is different, not trying to integrate the users. Large campground. Only problem with OHV use on trunk road is it's currently illegal since it's classified as a highway. Brought up in a briefing note in July we are requesting the trunk road and LOC roads be opened for OHV access to allow connectivity.
- **Year round outhouse accessibility on locked campgrounds:** Dale has an issue seeing locks on campgrounds. Is that something FOESA supports? FOESA would like to see them open but we have no capacity and are maxed out with our current volunteers and members, but we are working on that. Reasons for locking? Parks – no staff to clean them, more and more vandalism and thefts going on.

Weighing the cost of replacement and repair vs. some complaints. However, when locked outhouses sometimes the doors get kicked in. Parks have made extra contract arrangements to have some open year round i.e., Siffleur Falls staging. Some people have wanted to take over looking after them and then don't come through. Is FOESA going to address these issues? They haven't been having problems with their own campgrounds that are open year round. Right now FOESA is maxed out and if they take on more they would have to hire it out, so would need money to do that. FOESA is not prepared to do that right now. Commercial – which campgrounds? Dale – Hummingbird, Ram Falls, Wildhorse on YaHa Tinda road. Why such a concern? Can't even get in by vehicle that time of year so am wondering. Dale would like to see some changes mainly for seniors' access. How would you get the parking lot plowed out, maintenance? If areas aren't maintained then toilet access isn't the issue. The issue is the locked campgrounds. We want to corral random camping but Parks is locking campgrounds. AEP recreation management is having issues keeping toilets open with no money as well, and it's tough.

- **OH&S:** Dale doesn't feel it should apply to volunteers. We think it's getting worked on and FOESA has jumped through the hoops but are still unclear on where the group stands on bringing people in. We will learn on how to work with it in time. There are still a lot of inconsistencies on how it is being applied across the province. Equestrian – from a volunteer perspective, the problem is 100 page manuals vs. the amount of work done in clubs. Requirements need to get to the summary stage, not a 100 page document. Tchir – recognized inconsistencies between Parks and Operations in approach to OH&S and stewardship groups doing work on behalf of themselves vs. on behalf or as directed by government.
- **User fees:** Dale indicated that when he met with the Minister a fee of say \$30 per year, not to be spent in general funds, but for enforcement and maintenance. We understand that the \$30 fee will be part of the Alberta Trails Act. Do not know how fast this would come about but it would be a great source of funding recreation management. How to enforce? We don't know a lot about it right now. A lot of those funds would hopefully go back to enforcement.
- **Cell phone towers:** It's about an hour to get to cell service. Dale would like to see more cell phone towers in the backcountry. Tchir- there are Garmin inReach units and other affordable options for two way communication in the backcountry.
- **OHV access:** Dale indicated he heard something about connecting access from North to South for OHV's Tchir clarified that is a concept he had put forward connecting the Ghost PLUZ to Grande Prairie with economic development opportunities connecting tourism nodes and east slopes communities to bring in sustainable tourism. Just a concept at this point.
- **Sundre Forest Products (SFP):** Dale indicated that FOESA met with Sundre Forest Products about the items they wanted to do to help FOESA that haven't happened. SFP are wanting to do more with our group and possibly have some dollars. Some of the discussion ties into possible work on the James trail, sounds like that should be coming very soon. SFP suggested that maybe they should be allowed to log first and that may cover some of the trail work.
- **Red tape reduction:** Dale described that approvals were out to look at trails but when asked for approval, no one could give it then. Hopefully it will change to someone being able to say yes or no.
- **Klein Lake:** Put a stop to decommissioning it. Tchir – There is a lot of background to this and it is more complex Bull trout were and are upstream of the dam at the time the lake was created I believe for flood

protection. If the leaking earthen structure were to blow out it may put Panther River Adventures in jeopardy. There are still bull trout in the streams that we should also be thinking about.

- **Fundraising:** GOA cannot do fundraising like running their own poker rallies.
- **Winter Motorized:** Why thinking just a user fee surcharge on an OHV license plate, should not everyone using the westcountry pay a user fee? What about something like park passes? Should be an overall user fee – not just an OHV user fee. In the States they have had user fees for years and it's for all users.

***Action: Tchir – will express the committee's desire to have input on the user fee once it is ready for input.**

***Action: Parks – Grant Santo, Public lands- Lisa Schrader and DFO – need to find someone to provide a walk through of the approvals processes.**

- **Guides and Outfitters:** Where are we at in scope of our meetings? Still within the PLUZ boundaries or expanded? It had been voted to be expanded to Clearwater County a couple of meetings ago. Will have to expand the membership as well. Bigger room, more meetings.
 - **Mountain Biking:** E-bikes and policy should be on the radar. Has gone from 10% of sales to 50% so usage needs to be addressed. Parks - Looking at a policy for Kananaskis Country. Look at European model containing 3 types, not a wattage concern, it's the throttle and they can tear up the land. They should not be considered non-motorized.
- *Action: Grant to look into E-bike policy.**
- **Eco-Tourism:** One thing always agreed on is the need for more enforcement. That's the only question again. Any development? Parks – At this point, no. Big picture is it's on the radar. As we are undergoing a reorganization, if anything it sounds like enforcement may get stronger and it should all be in a positive manner. More enforcement presence and more public education on the landscape.

Maintenance and projects

- **Bighorn Heritage ATV Society (BHAS):** It was a wet summer and slow work. Finally managed to get some equipment out to the Bighorn Dam to drain on the east and west end. Then it snowed so going out again. At the end of August we applied for a grant extension. Late deep frost in spring and this caused lots of problems. Would like to do pre-trail assessments next spring. All the lumber is out at the Bighorn Dam, just waiting for the weather. Leave posted closure on for now until it gets frozen.
- **Panther Wagon Trail:** There may be a safety concern as far as the trail itself. Backcountry Flood Recovery did a bunch of work trying to fix that up, what does it look like now? Is there a safety concern? Equestrian - It was brought forward that a user doesn't like the crossing on the new road, would like to go back to Grocery Hill. The trail was supposed to be made to a GOA standard. Reality is it didn't quite get built as it was supposed to be, but it is still a safe trail. There is a little bit of a pitch into the river and if there was a flood it would pitch you to the side...but you wouldn't be out there during a flood. Do we need to take look for engineering controls? Not a lot of options there except for maybe some minor adjustments – about 25ft of trail. Is it more of an experience vs. lack of experience thing? Yes, that has a lot to do with it. It's not the trail up and down the hill, it's the river crossings. Right now it's a dry bed. Much more

accessible than it used to be. One challenge to the Flood Recovery Group was that they were not allowed to do any bed and shore work due to DFO. They had went in and did some hand work after that.

- **Canary Trail Reroute:** Did anyone go out and look at potential alternative routes. The Land Management Specialist spoke with the Commercial Trail Riders in the area. They figured there wasn't much of an alternative and objected to losing any more trails to OHVs. Did the CTR holders come to our Guides & Outfitters rep? He went to them. There is no alternative in a realistic point of view. Short of coming back out to the original old trail up the Ram which we are not looking at.
- **LOC Roads:** This item was brought up by Dale's letter and also as part of a briefing approved previously by the Minister. At this point we have approval to start working as a pilot, to start looking at opening up OHV access on LOC roads. What is LOC? License of Occupation which means, for example, oil and gas roads, logging roads. These could be long term roads, but non-permanent roads you can go on. How do we as a member of the general public know the difference? That's the question and the problem. We would like to formalize the access in areas of connectivity. This is going to be a pilot and will open up the ability to plan connectivity between trails. Looking at some restrictions as to what is allowed on these trails and roads.

Do need to make it clear that you need certain things on OHVx, ie headlight and taillight, etc. to use these roads and trails.

***Note Idaho trails have a great online system for trails and it's all listed.** The second link below refers to the 1750+ mile trail ride that Summer Motorized spoke to as well:

- <https://trails.idaho.gov/>
- <http://motorcyclejazz.com/TID.htm>

James Pass / Eagle Presentation (Wayne Crocker) – See Attached

- Work with Winter Motorized and FOESA
- Keeping in mind the type of use for this trail, looked at what level it needs to be build to.
- Whole valley from Trunk Road to YaHa Tinda is a very beautiful place. Easily understand why people want to come here.
- About a 12 kilometre hike round trip to assess from Trunk to James. Did determine trail was in rough shape. Went from west side of Eagle Lake and then through to James Lake. Looked at using the south side of Eagle and didn't get far (Dates on attachment should be Sept 4, 5 6 with Michael). Michael laid out new trail with good use of the slopes and very few crossings. Looked at land clearances with that line in mind. At present we are waiting for a plan from FOESA and what types of uses for this trail (i.e. wagon trail as well?) Would have to bring to the committees if wanting a change of current designation use.
- Red line on map represents the present trail. A major bridge would be needed at James Lake. Yellow line represents trail Michael had laid out. Would end up on the main trail and avoid a lot of issues. Looks like a more sustainable option and less money.

- 6 kilometres to James and approximately 6 to the Eagle end. Usage would be multi use, year round. Wagons were brought up, and pretty sure general consensus from FOESA is a 'no'. FOESA will pursue further and will put it to a vote at the next FOESA meeting in October. If no, we can start the approval process. First Nations Consultation has started and a disposition would be put on the trail. Will be talking to Sundre Forest Products to work with them, and there may be options to save a lot of money. Discussions were tentative for logging, but it may not be active logging until a year or two down the road. FOESA thought the logging would be in the next season, so they will meet with Sundre Forest Products and Winter Motorized and see about the logging timeframe.

Land Use Specialist would like to go out one more time from site to site, from James Lake back to Eagle parking lot. Right now from Eagle to James water comes down periodically and we have to get the trail out of that ditch. There's so much gravel in there it is not hard to find good ground. Cost of repairs will mainly be from James Lake east. Comment: On section between James and Eagle, a lot of that existing material is not good for about 5 feet down until you hit the base. Want to look at south side for more suitable material? Is there a better line staying on the south side? Will look at again.

- **Equestrian:** From the equine perspective, probably wouldn't look at it as a wagon trail, there are already other trails as options.

Public Land Use Zone (PLUZ) Presentation Andrea McMillan – See Attached. Summarized version sent with June meeting notes.

Questions:

- **Guide & Outfitters:** this came up because of the fear from the public if we make public land into a PLUZ. This information presented is interesting and needs to be shared with the community. We are all in favor of management in a better way. Personally would like to see the public land in the county turned into a PLUZ. Would like to have this presented publicly and discussions started so people can see the benefits and so that the reps are not getting backlash.

Answer: Can take this presentation to your groups if you are interested. Would like to do a better job of getting the info out there.

- **Equestrian:** thoughts on the outcry – public and private land outside of current PLUZ. Need to be clear that the PLUZ would be relative to the public land only. Other concern is it's implemented by orders in council and not by an act, so that has people concerned because there's no public consultation with orders in council.
- **Guide & Outfitters:** if not in support of a PLUZ how can we manage a trail outside of our present area? FOESA – we need to define the tools though before they would be put in place.
- **Equestrian:** in a PLUZ we have designated trails. Sound like there is confusion on where designated trails can be. In Panther the original plan was to put a designated trail from the camp on the hydro road, was the reason we didn't go ahead with that because it was on a disposition? Tchir – we need to relook at that.

***Action: Tchir – Opportunity if in scope to make the Panther road part of an LOC pilot project? Once ready to move forward John Tchir and Jay to discuss.**

- Lisa Schrader: Need to look at if it is within the Bighorn County or on the edge first.
- **Question:** Snowmobiles/timing restrictions in Hummingbird? It comes down to wildlife restrictions for the timing restrictions in the spring a lot of times. Even though there may be snow, it comes to wildlife as opposed to trail damage.
- Planning is looking for input about where that general 'what is a PLUZ' info should be. How best to present it publicly? Websites, brochures? Suggestions: County has a regular publication. Also where people are looking for information to plan a trip. Link on the Bighorn Backcountry brochure. Tourist information/Visitor Centres (paper). GOA offices (paper). Links on Bighorn Backcountry site and Rec site, if up.
- **Question:** Outside of Clearwater Trails Initiative, who can do anything outside of the current PLUZs? None of those trails have any protection on them. You cannot close to monster trucks, cannot close for maintenance, a lot more issues with rec management and keeping the public safe when you are outside of a PLUZ. Manure removal sites, random camping problems etc.

***Action: Sector representatives to bring this information back to the users you are representing and clarify the difference between what is achievable on Public Land vs. a PLUZ.**

Overview of Updated Terms of Reference (TOR)

- **Summer Motorized:** concerns with expanding the scope. There is already a very lengthy list of priorities we are having trouble meeting. Are we really able to look outside the current PLUZ and meet more priorities?
- **Winter Motorized:** no controls so no PLUZ outside. Maybe we should just concentrate on what we have.

Tchir – PLUZ proposal is currently off the table, should we still expand the scope? Maybe need more refinement of the scope.

- **Summer Motorized:** Can we use the PLUZ as a model and implement it outside of the PLUZ? Resource – we can't without legislation. We can put up a sign but it's not enforceable.

If/when we expand we need new people to come in to represent the larger scope, and are the current members here representation of the larger scope?

- **Guides & Outfitters:** if we don't expand we are missing out on opportunities like the Baseline trails.
- **Mountain Biking:** we can use as a planning tool. Then we would get a lot of traction in the future.
- **Hiking:** anything you do in a particular area affects all the areas around it. Have to look at the big picture because it will have repercussions around it. Maybe we do need sub-committees to deal with particular

projects. This committee could be restricted to higher level details and then could go to a subcommittee to deal with the details.

- **Equestrian:** do we believe there is value in putting a sign up 'voluntary trail closure' and see if it's effective? Hasn't been effective in the past. It does make some aware though.
- **Winter Motorized:** we have probably 200 kilometres of trails outside of PLUZ and used to fix it up, but we don't anymore because there was no enforcement and we can't afford maintenance anymore.
- **Mountain Biking:** that's the responsibility of the user groups' to bring that to the table.
- **Parks:** we don't have to feel bad about scaling back to just the current PLUZ.

Tchir – hearing a happy medium in the room. Hearing that we do want to know what's going on outside the current PLUZ, but don't necessarily want to have a voice on what is happening or planned. Rocky ATV, Clearwater Trails Initiative, Rail Trail – do we have them as a standing agenda item? Point would be to have awareness for the group.

- **Planning:** during discussions about regional planning, etc, the Bighorn Backcountry Standing Committee is thought to be full of experts and if there were to be future sub-regional or regional planning, this committee would be on the list of contacts for input no matter what.

Tchir – I see this as a working committee, making sure we have trails for multiple different uses. How do we fit in more connectivity, and that's not addressed in the current TOR. Is there a way to address the strategic conversations without re-writing the TOR and the intent of the committee going from being an implementation team to a sounding board. If we don't discuss even small trail changes here, then some don't feel consulted. We will ask to see more strategic items brought for agenda items from the committee reps moving forward as well.

*Went around the table with majority to stick to Bighorn Backcountry PLUZ (7 to 1) as the scope with the following comments:

- remain just the PLUZ unless dealing with connectivity issues
- remain just the PLUZ with possibility to discuss what's happening or else we cut ourselves off
- many of the conversations now are much to do with outside of the Bighorn. If we don't work towards that, we need to relook at what's being done within. Shouldn't discuss issues outside boundaries if we can't advise on it.

***Action: Decision - remove expansion from the scope with the opportunity to bring up items outside the PLUZ.**

- **Parks:** will have more info on where we are going within the year.

***Action: Build out a 15 minute block in the agenda for outside of PLUZ items.**

Outside of the PLUZ we are still talking to people about the same problems.

- **Equestrian:** inclusion of Parks Canada? Bighorn Backcountry is not boundaried by Clearwater County only, include other counties? Ask if Rick from Parks Canada – YaHa Tinda Ranch can start to attend the meetings?

***Action: Tchir to contact Parks Canada.**

***Action: All Standing/Steering to send in comments regarding TOR to Laura by end of November 2019.**

***Action: Tchir - Include in TOR - task teams to be used for operations work.**

NEXT MEETING DATE: Thursday, January 30, 2020