

# **Bighorn Backcountry**

## **Access Management Plan**

### **Monitoring: Standing Committee**

**February 5, 2015 FINAL COPY**

**Rocky Mountain House Museum Boardroom**

#### **In Attendance**

Don Livingston	Wayne Crocker	Margriet Berkhout	Lisa Schrader
Art Terpsma	Lorne Hindbo	Adena Earl	Chiarastella Feder
Rita Stagman	Dennis Schafer	Rick Artzen	Brad Andrews
Doug Ritchie	Lew Hand	Jay Mills	Dale Marshall
Kendra Blin	Curtis Nichol	Don Scott	Loyal Ma
Kyle Greenwood	Laura Raivio		

#### **Chair**

Don Livingston

#### **Introduction**

Everyone thanked for attending the meeting. Round-table introductions were completed. Roger Marvin (equestrian) has stepped down and is replaced by Don Scott. Mike Horembala (youth) has moved leaving and opening there as well.

#### **Activity/Enforcement Update**

We are going to be starting the May long planning program with no changes expected from last year. Parks is now with ESRD again (parks/trails side) and the Seasonal Park Rangers' focus was to give some enforcement capacity outside of PRAs in the past. We are trying to ramp that up for this summer again and are hoping for 2 additional Park Rangers for this area.

There is a Landuse Framework meeting on February 12<sup>th</sup> getting into biodiversity. Cal will be attending for the Clearwater Trails Initiative. Rick Artzen and Dale Marshall will be attending for the Bighorn Backcountry Standing Committee Monitoring Group.

Brochures are sent to print. ESRD has a booth at the Red Deer Sportsman's Feb 27-March 1.

#### **Signage**

There was a discussion by email about a more permanent timed closure at the Bighorn Dam and Tershishner due to consistently wet and eroded spring trails. Essentially most representatives were in favor. We have had temporary closures in place for the last four years in a row at the Bighorn Dam and work has now been done on Tershishner, so we want to protect that. The closure will be for May and June each year. Reps were expressing a desire to upgrade trails to have them open all year round but it's kind of like a county road and road bans...do you go to the expense to make all roads open all year round? May long is traditionally heavy OHV traffic but not so much between that and July 1<sup>st</sup>. Hopefully we will be able to direct the public to other sustained trails that can withstand spring riding. We want to have the ability to allow people to know ahead of time.

Looking at getting a seasonal summer student again for signage this year. Sign standards are already active for parks and we are looking at adopting that.

Comment: Clearwater is the only county in Alberta where we are able to use County enforcement. Clearwater County is very actively involved and a good collaboration. Parks, County and RCMP are the main enforcement for recreation in our area. The Sundre RCMP are keen to get on board as well. This area is the showplace for everybody pitching in.

Question: Between going through creeks vs. on roads, is a creek fine is higher than bridge/road fine? What do you do? If people are doing the right thing and staying out of the creek and following the edge of the road to get across then that's the right thing to do. Currently all fines still have to go through mandatory court.

Question: How come we can legally drive on County roads within the County but once we get further back into the bush we can't drive on the Trunk road and lease roads? That rule is under the general Traffic Safety Act. How does the general public know which road they can drive on or not? This is being brought up with Alberta Transportation along with helmets and headlights/taillights. Wasn't the fact that farmers use their quads to check their cattle the reason this came in? It was the initial intention.

### **FOESA**

Friends of the Eastern Slopes Banquet is on Feb 21<sup>st</sup>. Currently FOESA is still dealing with Alberta Parks regarding taking over campgrounds. They have agreed to let us take over 7 Mile but on only a one year term. Provision of funding and allowing quad access here are the views of the FOESA group but these items are not agreeable to Parks as uses. We are looking for help to push this along as we are fairly close to getting approval. The timber companies/oil companies may put dollars into opening some of these campgrounds and provide facilities, but are wanting other groups to manage them as opposed to the companies themselves.

One timber company didn't like the single year term for 7 mile, so didn't want to give dollars for that short period of time.

It's been a good year, lots accomplished and awaiting some permissions. We received verbal approval to expand to the east at Bighorn Creek, but it was then rescinded and work stopped. Campgrounds in good shape.

(See attachment)

### **Backcountry Trails Flood Rehabilitation Program (BTFRP)**

Winter has been spent on planning. We looked at all flood inventory data and group stakeholder info and ESRD and came up with 2015 projects. Once chosen we checked for any red flags and are now going ahead with getting approvals and consultations, hiring staff and scheduling the projects. Thirty-five projects are planned for within the Bighorn Backcountry.

Membership volunteer software can be provided if you are interested, coming up in March. This software basically gives capability input all members and provides a way to communicate with them directly, advertise events, communicate with other groups, submit docs and keep track of training/tickets (1<sup>st</sup> aid, chainsaw cert). Can you provide list to give to members to see what qualification tickets people have? Yes, can even do a group search to see whose certs have expired, etc.

Some changes to last year are that we will have more contractor projects, larger projects being done by contract. Our trail crews will be focussed more on smaller backcountry projects. We will also have some user group-led projects. A new contract coordinator will be starting to look after all the contractors and a new stewardship coordinator will be starting as well with Kendra on mat-leave.

This is the big year for projects in the Bighorn Backcountry. If there is a project that really needs done get the info to Kendra now. A map of a quick overview of all the projects coming up for 2015 in the Bighorn will be sent out Feb 17th and there is an open house on Feb 24<sup>th</sup> at the Canalta in Rocky from 7-9 p.m. Projects to which Kendra spoke to each individual group have already made the list.

Question: How many projects are remote vs contract? Hummingbird is mostly trail crew, contractors mostly in southern part (below Bighorn Backcountry). One thing to remember is non-motorized trails may have heavy equipment being utilized or OHVs/wagons to get the jobs done.

Example of project – the Tershishner area is going to be completely fixed this year.

### **North Saskatchewan Regional Plan (NSRP)**

RAC advice is done but we don't know when we will see it. There may be a delay due to the potential of a spring election. Looking again for a plan for the green area, to work with industry to look at the greater area and designate trails/camping spots. May be something like a PLUZ for these areas or potential conservation areas. Dormer/Sheep PLUZ will become the Don Getty Wildland Park from the SSRP, just unsure when the change is taking place.

There is the same struggle with who is going to be the land manager but then Parks and ESRD were put under the same ministry. Does this help? Different management rules affect commercial activities, OHV

use and needs to be looked at. Would like a much more common regulatory structure. Several people have asked that this Bighorn group is the model for managing public land.

### **Clearwater Trails Initiative**

In 2006 a similar group to the Clearwater Trails Initiative was started between then SRD and Sunpine, and using FRIAA money to try to get the public to use good trails instead of bad. The group was tasked to get 200km of sustainable trails in the area, found a lot of bad, couldn't find 200km of good. In the end liability discussions drove an end to these talks.

The now diverse Clearwater Trails Initiative group including members from Clearwater Country, AER, ESRD, the oil and gas industry, FMA holders and the public was started about a year ago. Generally speaking the idea today is to improve the recreation opportunities using the existing industry footprint and also satisfy industry needs. Rig Street is the sample area being looked at as it has a lot going on in a very small area.

Another component being introduced by the group is education to the public so they know where they should and shouldn't be due to pipe exposure, erosion, live wells, etc. Currently there is a large amount of random camping at wellsites. The general public doesn't know what is dangerous or not.

The group is tied in with the Sasquatch messaging from County which indicates approved and not approved campsites. This messaging is soon going to be focussing on trails as well. The current struggle is due to the area not being located in a PLUZ so we only have moderate ability.

Question: When dealing with trail initiatives for OHVs, ever limit what kind of tire is being used? Not currently but we do have a weight limit.

Challenges – essentially the hindrance is ten years with no recreational plan, no real funding, no real staff for planning, dodgy enforcement, legislation, some current acts/regulations and lots of GOA related hurdles.

### **Wagon Trail at Panther**

The idea is to try to restore trails up to the federal park boundary.

The intention is to try to get the trail out of the river. The group used Lidar to do some analysis on new trail possibilities. This multi-use trail project would eliminate all the crossings of the Panther River except one. Is there an avenue to come out of the backcountry if the water came up? Location of proposed trail is much better than the historical trail as well as safer. Net trail gain to loss – less trail in the end. Looking for Bighorn Backcountry group agreement to go ahead and explore these options. Concerns about the new trail being in a possible wildlife corridor? Most of the proposal is located in flood recovery domain. Important to look at a single track at the Gap at the same time? Yes, it provides an opening to other users. Probably more hikers than mountain bikers would use the single track. They will go ahead and explore.

### **Wagon Trail at Timber Creek**

In July 2013 the trail to 40 Mile became impassable due to severe flood. The equestrian group came in to make repairs and found new places to cross, but those crossings are now dangerous to get through. The wagon trail itself remains very rough and needing work. There is a pack trail/OHV trail with timing restrictions on currently on Timber Creek that is needing a new bridge. The group is looking for an upgrade of the OHV trail and new bridge installation to allow for wagons and have a new wider bridge installed over Timber Creek. Current crossings force rigs to remain in the river for extended periods and cross in high dangerous water.

The flood recovery program has looked at getting this bridge in because of the stream sensitivity and location. They will put in the bridge needed for what designation we decide. This would result in only two river crossings for the wagons. A larger bridge would be steel prefab or fibreglass, 10 ft wide, 15000 lb capacity. Trail is already wide enough as it is a reclaimed truck trail and doesn't actually have to have a wagon designation. It's a go and a larger bridge will be installed.

### **Wildfire Update**

On the prescribed burn books for 2015 again is the Chungo, Blackstone, Wapiabi, Hummingbird, Upper Clearwater and we are working on a plan for Bighorn Creek with Banff National Park. 2014 was a wet fire season for much of the area and we did not get good conditions for one of the larger prescribed burns. We did burn the 40 Mile meadow. A monitoring camera was installed at 40 Mile to monitor snow conditions on a mountain slope that is one of the capping units, and the meadow. The camera takes a picture once a day, it is not for surveillance. The camera helped to pinpoint the burn window for the meadow.

We used this camera to monitor the Spreading Creek fire for almost four months as well after we pulled crews and equipment off. We had it taking pictures every hour and send them to Duty Officer's email.

2015 in the Upper Clearwater, we hope to burn the slope this year. BNP wants a joint proposal to do a larger burn between 40 Mile to beyond the federal park boundary. This is a proposal that needs to be worked out and operations will be 2016 at the earliest. In the Hummingbird the snow often stays for a long time. We are hoping for a dry spring this season. In Blackstone we are also hoping for a spring burn but we have to do one at a time. We currently want to make the initial plan bigger in the Wapiabi for operations and habitat, same with the Chungo. At Bighorn Creek, in conjunction with federal parks, the focus is on areas that were more open in the past and are now grown over, so looking for old fire scars. This will be a big benefit to elk and sheep in that area.

Question: Why not harvesting as opposed to burning? This area was harvested in the past to create elk habitat under the "Buck for Wildlife Program" but is in the R11 zone and fire was identified as the main management tool. Not planning on going all the way to Eagle Lake.

Look for trail closure signs – it can be very short notice but we usually don't close the trails for very long. Notifications will be sent out to our stakeholder list. Contact us if you want your name added.

**Open floor**

- Fat tire biking is gaining in popularity and they like to use snowmobile trails. Tracking is taking place at Twin to Crimson Lakes.

**Next Standing Committee Meeting – THURSDAY, JUNE 4, 2015**