

Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan

Monitoring: Standing Committee

February 6, 2012 **FINAL COPY**
Super 8 Motel - Rocky Mountain House

In Attendance

Don Livingston	Wayne Crocker	Gordon Sanders	Robin McDonald
Laura Raivio	Simon Dyer	Kevin Gagne	Lorne Hindbo
Cal Rakach	Dennis Schafer	Lonnie Earl	Neil Godlonton
Case Korver	Roger Marvin	Myles Jensen	Curtis Nichol
Loyal Ma			

Chair

Don Livingston

Introduction

Everyone thanked for attending the meeting. Round-table introductions were completed.

Lands Manager Rob Popowich has moved to a Forest Operation Unit Lead position in Edmonton, Don Livingston will be filling Rob's role until further notice. Mike Doyle has stepped down as representative for Staging Area / Trail Adoptee with no replacement to date. Fishing and Hunting now has Phil Lacerte as the representative and Robin McDonald as the alternate. Clearwater County has had a change in representation from Jim Duncan to Case Korver. Mountain Biking has a change in alternate from Rob Hunter to Brad Andrews. Lonnie Earl is sitting in for Don Rillings at this meeting as there is not an official alternate for Fixed Commercial to date. There is still an outstanding need for representatives and/or alternates for First Nations, Youth, Staging Area/Trail Adoptee and Fixed Commercial.

Role of Representatives / Alternates

Initially when starting the Bighorn Backcountry Standing Committee, Monitoring Group we went out looking for people to sit on the committee from local area associations. The idea was to have someone representing the interests of the different user groups, get the info back out to the community in general and, in turn, bring their concerns forward. This discussion is just to reiterate the need for the reps/alternates to disseminate the information discussed at these meetings appropriately and engage other individuals/groups of interest. General inquiries usually get sent to the appropriate group representative to be brought forward. The website also has contact information and shows the person(s) that represent your interests. As stated in the Terms of Reference, if both the representative and alternate members are in attendance at a meeting then only one vote counts if a vote is required.

The Steering Committee is made up of government representatives. The role of the Standing Committee is as a sounding board to present ideas and give advice with the Steering Committee making the final decision. As when the access management plan was implemented, changes that would remain in place for more than one year have to be brought before the Standing Committee for consideration and will therefore become part of that public process. As a whole we have operated very well but it is good to go back and check the roots of the group's responsibilities. That's the purpose of the five year review.

Comment – hunting regulations show added corridors. Did that come through either committee? No, not through us. Disappointment expressed that we had no input.

Comment – has anything been put forward regarding fishing? No. We don't know about any consultation. We do have to work on having a better presence of a Fish & Wildlife biologist at these meetings.

Activities, Enforcement and Signing

Activities - The new Bighorn Backcountry brochures have been sent to print and are expected back around mid February.

Area maps for Cutoff Creek, Bighorn Dam, Hummingbird, Coliseum and a new one for Cline River Corridor are being worked on with the expectation of going to print mid to end of February. Where applicable we have noted the new February 1 closing date on some trails to OHVs.

SRD is attending the Red Deer Sportsman Show March 9th, 10, 11 as well as in Edmonton. Attendance was made at the Emerald Day on Feb 3rd at Red Deer College.

LED boards – we have had some slogan space on the LED boards in Rocky, Sundre and Drayton Valley in the past and will again this year with hopes for approval on stronger messaging.

Ask the Expert – We have a couple of spots in the local newspaper for a Q&A under “Ask The Expert”. What types of items would you like to see covered? Poker rally permits? How, where for firewood permits?

Signage – After the field trip to BC we decided to try the fibreglass signs/posts with decals. They are much lighter to utilize and carry as well as very durable. A trial run for these is around the Bighorn Dam area at intersections that are currently unmarked to promote trail utilization. Many times people don't know where they are so won't use a connector trail. Past types of posts have been broken very easily. One item of note from BC is the signage used there and in the States works very well.

Comment – Comparable to the standard used in the States. From a consistency standpoint it's very good. The Snowmobile Association has been using a national standard, this has somewhat been tried to be adopted into the summer corridors.

Enforcement – This is the first winter that SRD has been unable to have guardians and 2012 is questionable. There is currently no training program. The new premier changed F&W and Parks officers from SRD to Solicitor General so we are waiting to see the outcome from that decision. Unsure what will be happening or how this will effect Lands enforcement as particulars are still being worked on.

Comments – Would a letter to the Minister noting avid concern about the lack of guardians help? Motorized has definitely done that in the past to no avail. It would be good for groups to keep putting the issue forward and keep it up front. How do we get our concerns noticed? Each group send a letter? The more people involved the better. Cannot do as a committee? As a committee we can pass on that there is a recommendation as a Standing Committee to the Steering Committee. Right now it's not necessarily that guardians need to be the enforcement as long as there's someone able to wield the tools that came with PLAR.

***NOTE: Continuation of the Guardian Program strongly suggested by this group.**

Suggestions - Get the groups and multiple letters going, a larger amount of groups has a stronger showing.

March 5th is the projected date for answers to what will be covered in this switch to Solicitor General. If it has worked out to our favour we would actually have access to more individuals.

Review

The five year review report is complete with some editing being done, then it will be passed on to the Steering Committee and then the Standing Committee. No surprises while reviewing. When the access management plan was done it mainly focussed on the lines on the map. A long term vision was not there. Now there are more and more people on the landscape so we need to plan out what we want it to look like and where do we want to go in the future. As decisions come with regional planning it will help guide us but there is a hold up at present. The premise is to get a rough idea of what each experience would look like (i.e. using equestrian or OHV opportunities).

SRD is still going to try to do some regional access planning and get direction on how to add and subtract opportunities. Two of the eight recommendations in the review speak to that aspect. One is basically speaking to no net trail loss. If opportunities are taken out then look at new ones to replace them. It is always easy to remove a line on the map, but entirely more difficult to add one. The second is good behaviour. Managed opportunities used well and legally, with good behaviour shown should be rewarded with additional opportunities.

Clearwater County is funding a contractor to develop the Nordegg Recreation Concept Plan to identify and manage recreational uses around Nordegg. The key purpose outlined in the meeting is to address the need for improved clarity and competing uses. There is need of a staging area and routes around the industrial area and Nordegg. A meeting with the Nordegg trail users will take place on February 8 and a draft plan will have to come through the Bighorn committees before being put into place.

Comments – We need to present a vision even while awaiting direction, one that is done and agreed on jointly between Steering and Standing. The five year review is three years overdue. Should we just include the vision within the report to get it going faster? No, we shouldn't combine the two, it will depend on regional planning. Depending on how a trail organization works out there might be a 'trail act' after the spring sitting. Bighorn Backcountry, Ghost and Castle are furthest ahead and may be a starting point.

Comment – The Standing Committee hasn't been able to review regulatory enhancement and many other items. What is the strategy and who's responsible to implement? We are waiting for the land use framework. We must concentrate on regional planning to get going ahead.

Comment – The Committees need to take the initiative to at least put a framework together. Agreed that we should get it ready for when the time comes that it can be implemented we will then be a step ahead.

Edmonton Recreation Update

1) From TPR/Trevor Tarnowski on the Bighorn Dam project:

- A letter from Stoney First Nations was received by Parks on Jan 3 stating they have concerns and wish to be consulted on any changes in provincial designation to lands associated with the project
- A meeting with Parks, SRD, and Stoney First Nations will be set up ASAP to discuss the Bighorn Dam proposal in more detail, however no date has been set yet
- The majority of site assessments for the facility development proposal have been completed and work is ongoing on a draft proposal which should be complete by April 1st 2012
- All key stakeholders including the Bighorn Steering / Standing Committees will have an opportunity to review the draft Facility development proposal and provide feedback
- An external user survey that will include the draft facility development proposal is planned for May to July 2012 to gather further feedback

Regarding the rail trail tying Nordegg, Bighorn Dam and Kiska/Willson; Sundre Forest Products' FMA is up for renewal so Don is asking that the new FMA leave out the disposition for the rail trail (Beaverdam to Rocky Mtn House). One other change to an FMA being considered is regarding the expansion of the Cutoff Creek PLRA.

2) Land Management Branch:

- Bryan Osborne is now the section head for the Resource, Planning and Guidance unit (formerly Dan Grahn's position)
- Branch very recently assumed lead role for coordinating/facilitating SRD involvement in Landuse Framework policy, planning and implementation
- Will continue to support outreach/trade shows (scaled back from previous years, but funding 2012 Red Deer, Edmonton and Grande Prairie shows)
- Is assembling draft options/direction for trails/infrastructure that will be presented to Lands Working Group
- Looks forward to receiving/reviewing the Bighorn report

3) Provincial Policy

- Todd Letwin has developing an implementation plan for PLAR rollout.
- No updates on Recreation and Tourism Management Strategy since November. DMs were to meet to discuss and provide direction on next steps.
- Trails DAO. Investigation of implementation options is proceeding. Task teams have assembled and presented their recommendations to the project management team which will guide/inform next phases of work. TPR/SRD DMs met in December and clarified that - as the DAO mandate was focused on service delivery rather than land management - TPR would lead and provide oversight with SRD (and other ministry) support. A formal project update is anticipated to be conveyed to TPR managers in early February and we hope additional detail will be available for SRD at that time.

How are we dealing with volunteers in the Bighorn Backcountry regarding the Recreation and Tourism Management Strategy? We are carrying on as usual until further notice. Right now it leaves opportunities sitting in limbo and some areas are suffering. Currently volunteer groups have to take ownership and liability if installing a bridge but have no recourse. No one wants to take that on.

Comment – DAO legislation to be brought forward for spring term. So we are hoping to see it happening. Standards, etc. need to be ready if Ghost / Bighorn are the first areas to be looked at.

Under PLAR Access Permits are not required for regular hunting, fishing and camping. You can go for 14 days before you are required to move. This is allowed as long as it doesn't conflict with disturbance standards, which are not in place yet. Commercial use needs an Access Permit. So far commercial is just hunting and outfitting. Who's doing permit? SRD. New legislation will have dispositions for trails, but we don't know what it will look like. The PLAR committee has large list of things that need to be addressed. Commercial trapping and cabin site policies are being ironed out.

Clearwater Trail Initiative stakeholders have been brought together to look at the bigger picture on public land. They will be revitalizing the initiative and looking at the purpose of a Delegated Trail Authority. Recently Clearwater County had council approval. The SRD Area Manager is part of this group to look at the Clearwater Area for a home grown solution dealing with trails and being the authority with this area. Shell is a big player in this and they've said their biggest unplanned risk on their facilities is recreation. They may come up with a pilot project to start with and then continue on.

FOESA Update

Since the last meeting all the outhouses except Cutoff Creek have been vacuumed. Manure has been cleaned up and piled and gravel spread under highlines and hitching posts at Hummingbird and Eagle Creek PLRAs.

In 2012 plans are to place 3 concrete picnic tables at Eagle Creek and 20 wooden picnic tables at the campgrounds.

In December, SRD was presented with a proposal to upgrade the James Pass trail. A bridge is being considered for crossing the James but we would definitely consider other alternatives (i.e. a rock crossing) if this would be acceptable. As it stands, the dirt work, geo-tech, culverts and other supplies excluding the crossing would be in the \$50,000.00 range and we definitely would have to procure outside funding

Feb 18 is the Annual General Meeting for FOESA which impacts the Bighorn Backcountry Standing Committee as FOESA is the umbrella group for the Staging Area/Trail Adoptee.

Once a new board is elected, SRD will meet with the new members and explain the past and current relationship with FOESA with expectations that they will continue on as the umbrella group.

Vision for the Future

This item was mainly covered under the Five Year Review. We need to think long term and each new plan, as it comes into place, can steer us along. SRD is pushing Edmonton for direction again. Out of the two plans they speak to the whole regional trail system, connecting trail systems for the province.

Loss of OHV Trails

Speaks to the two statements noted under the Review. No net loss and rewards for good behaviour. The focus of all trails are not necessarily just inside the Bighorn Backcountry but in the Clearwater County as well. Ideally we would like to spread the trail usage out to other areas not just concentrating and overusing one area.

Comment – Regarding the Bighorn Dam if we are planning to build facilities and draw a lot more people to the area we will see increased density and usage. What are our plans to deal with this? More trails? One option would be to provide more trail opportunities to lessen the concentration of users. Tershishner area is adjacent, for example, but desperately needs volunteers and/or a trail plan which could open more trails in that area. There are areas for this opportunity in the Clearwater County being discussed as well. Historically the Bighorn Dam seems to be about minimizing conflict and solving problems. Appropriate resources will be required if we are going to be advertising facilities.

Change of Trail Usage

Kidd Creek trail area has an issue with people riding off trail and the sheep population in general. SRD viewed some low rail and natural fencing that other areas are using to keep riders on the trail yet still allowing the sheep to easily jump over as an escape route. We currently have lots of signage out there but decided it may be more beneficial to have a sign stating why this area is sensitive in addition to a fence. SRD is obtaining information from biologists and from Edmonton explaining sheep escape routes, erosion, etc. For fence installation there is a bobcat and auger available and we can have a work bee to install a single, low rail fence as a joint project between the different user groups this summer. The Committee has looked for a project to unite all of the users and an there is an opportunity to get some donations of posts, rails, manpower (hike up, bike up, quads haul supplies) to meet and have a work bee. While at the

location with a bobcat digging auger holes we may be able to put a low rail fence by the toilets across the valley, as a public safety measure near the viewpoint.

Comment – great idea! Multiple members support.

Comment - Are we still open to timed closures or an alternate route for this trail in the future? SRD explored an alternate route in the past but none is suitable to date. We also need biologist input as to whether the sheep population low everywhere or just there. If we can keep users on the core route for the interim, that is what this rail fence is to accomplish.

Clearwater Horse Trail – This trail was classified as motorized but due to the inability to maintain it for this use a portion has been changed to non-motorized. That area still needs to have a trail plan as many OHV trails have been removed. There is a need to find a champion for that area and then we can start to focus on it. Solution for the time being is to remove this portion until something changes (repairs/maintainable).

We have a good opportunity to link to other trails, Nordegg and connectivity from the Joyce Creek trail system. At present user trails end at the trunk road, leaving them looking for a way to continue on.

Grizzly bear recovery program – big efforts towards finding out about access restrictions. These restrictions could effect the group and our decisions. So far there is just vague information with no hard guidelines regarding trails.

Prescribed Burn Plans

Prescribed burn plans for 2012 are being worked on with some exact locations changing. Hummingbird plans may end up being closer to staging area. Some active plans are also within the Bighorn area - South Saskatchewan, Wapiabi and Blackstone are still on the books.

Hat Mountain Powerpoint shown as per prior meeting.

Open Floor

Are jet boats and personal watercraft and issue? The only river within the PLUZ that you can run a power boat on is the North Saskatchewan. Canoeing and random camping? There are some issues and it was brought up. DTHS has an active program studying these issues related to random camping along the river. The group recorded the amount of human waste and disturbances that were occurring and put garden thrones in place. Rivers are addressed under PLAR and are owned by the province. The same sort of things we are dealing with regarding the Bighorn Backcountry may become more formalized for access and designated sites.

The West Fraser FMA is coming up with regards to trail bed. One other spot is the Cutoff Creek PLRA with the idea to make it bigger. SRD is sending recommendations to Edmonton.

Suggestion to look at for trail development within Bighorn Backcountry vision would be to create a link to all the little segments of trail, right from the Bighorn Dam south to the South

Ram and then all the way down to the James Gap. It would be quite interesting and to see alternative trails outside of the PLUZ as well to provide alternatives to closures, etc. Agreed, that's where this group with a funding mechanism to carry it out would be able to go.

Timeline for 'future vision' ideas? – prior to the next meeting

Is the Bighorn group involved with Rocky-Nordeg, Saunders, etc.? Development in these areas would take the pressure off of the Bighorn Backcountry which is our focus but would definitely help and be desirable.

Are there issues crossing the Bighorn Reserve? Council does not want it at this time. Down the road, if people behave, they may allow some type of access to facilities or perhaps something like a heritage opportunity on the south side of the camping area at the Dam.

Next Standing Committee Meeting – Thursday, June 7, 2012