

# Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan

## Monitoring: Standing Committee

January 31, 2013 **FINAL COPY**  
Super 8 Motel - Rocky Mountain House

### In Attendance

Don Livingston	Wayne Crocker	Gordon Sanders	Neil Godlonton
Laura Raivio	Carly Steiger	Paul Radchenko	Simon Dyer
Roger Marvin	Robin McDonald	Lorne Hindbo	Cal Rakach
Dennis Schafer	Lonnie Earl	Kristofer Heemeryck	Kevin Gagne
Dale Marshall	Case Korver	Curtis Nichol	Brent Wyman
Trevor Tarnowski	Doug Ritchie	Brad Andrews	Chiarastella Feder
Rita Stagman	Arshad Ali		

### Chair

Don Livingston

### Introduction

Everyone thanked for attending the meeting. Round-table introductions were completed. New ESRD fire representative Kris Heemeryck and Edmonton ESRD Planning representative Arshad Ali were introduced.

### Activities, Enforcement, Signing

A letter to the Premier was sent by representatives of the Bighorn Standing Committee, received in Edmonton and made it to ESRD upper management very quickly. A response was received from the operations section, directly from the Operations ADM.

Counties also met with ministers and talked about enforcement/random camping ,etc. The DM wants enforcement agreements in place by May for Grande Cache south to the border and this will be the priority. These will address both PLUZ and non-PLUZ areas with additional peace officers to be coming from other areas for high priority times. May to September will be the core period and then focus starts to turn to hunting, closed roads, etc. Definitely seeing a move ahead and we're looking forward. There have been some strategy discussions with specific members of group but mostly at a higher level. Currently the majority of public compliance is good but if no one is out there things do slip a little bit. There is a need for patrols in and outside of the Bighorn Backcountry and the commitment has been made that there will be an enforcement presence this year. SSRP addresses this management intent and will be factored in. We are still in talks on if ESRD will have any enforcement capability within.

Major changes are happening: SRD has amalgamated with Environment and enforcement has gone to Solicitor General. There now isn't a Lands or Fish & Wildlife branches, it is all operations with a planning division and a

policy division. Other divisions aren't gone, just under operations now. Also, oil and gas is being transferred over to a single regulator, ERCB, from cradle to grave as of June 2013. Other items, for example, sand and gravel, minerals, power lines, grazing, range, municipal works all stay with ESRD. Roads and power lines associated with oil and gas are theirs, timber is ours. ESRD is certainly still going to be involved in planning stage.

Signage – placed a large sign order before the crunch. We are still wondering about funding and making some assumptions that it is still ESRD responsibility. Mainly we deal with PLUZ's but more recently with the ability to close areas under PLAR we need additional signs for closures (i.e. Falls Creek). Tried a new system for trail signage last year using fibreglass poles and stickers behind the Bighorn Dam and if it works out we will probably expand on this. Squirrels are still eating the wood ones.

Completed a few patrols this winter, overall still pretty good. Member of the public would like to donate money for a bench and a picnic table at Kidd Creek Hill and he is filling the kiosk with area maps once a month.

ESRD is planning to attend Red Deer Sportsman's Show March 1-3 as it is a very valuable asset to be able to field questions. Edmonton show is March 14-17. What has been the key items asked by the public at these shows? Requests for maps and where can we go quadding, hiking, etc.

Received a response on the inquiry regarding an App for I-phone and there is not one yet. Web services is in the midst of creating another app, has taken about a year and there's still some issues. Once the issues with this one are cleared up they are looking to expand to other programs. Depending on the external and internal website we are looking at a 2014 mark. Looking at moving away from GPS side and moving more towards the apps side. Does the GPS on smartphones work without cell coverage? Some do. If you had a geo-reference map behind it, it would still work. Also discussed is a provincial area trail closure app.

Nordegg Chamber of Commerce inquired through the fixed commercial representative about having reps at these meetings. The fixed commercial rep is part of the COC and if they want to bring forward any items they should go through him and in turn, he should be disseminating any information from these meetings back to the COC.

### **Nordegg Trail Plan**

Changed what type of activities can occur in the specific areas on the PLUZ brochure by showing where motorized and non-motorized could take place. A further meeting with the Nordegg Trail Plan committee facilitator and County will take place on Monday. The current plan does not include the area within the town site so County will look at that section. The 2013 PLUZ brochure reflects those changes and ESRD is looking at doing a small blowout map for the kiosks to have available to the public.

As a result of the interest in this trail plan, a small stewardship group has been started for fundraising, etc. It is in its early stages and trying to get off ground with the first meeting happening in a week or two. Its focus will be on any trail that radiates from Nordegg and includes about a dozen permanent residents covering all activity groups.

Last fall the County moved ahead with work on the Rail Trail and partly developed the staging area in the industrial section (encompasses 2 lots) constructing a trail towards the Beaverdam PRA. The next goal is to move westward.

On the County website there is a link that discusses monetary forecasts for the Rail Trail. The concept is there and plan is now to complete bite-size pieces as dollars come along. The DAO to cross the Bighorn River is still

sitting at the legislature, for third time now. Is there a map to be released? There is one on the county website and is reflected on the brochure, with plans to do a blowout.

Fish Lake and Goldeye have some firesmart work going around them and harvesting in process. We are looking at using leftover roading once it is no longer in use for cross country skiing, etc.

Comments made that this would be an excellent time to go forward with the formation of the group to determine what the vision for the future of the Bighorn Backcountry should be. This group will consist of representatives from the current Steering and Standing Committees.

### **Change of Trail Status**

Aylmer/Smallpox Trail has been re-designated to a timing restricted trail (green – Dec 1-Feb 1) due to the wet bottom and volunteers being unable to get in there to perform any maintenance with the excess of eroded trails happening with the summer rains.

The Littlehorn Trail has been changed to non-motorized, once again, due to serious erosion and landslides. There hasn't been much activity witnessed around the Littlehorn Trail. People are travelling up the Cline Creek/Sugar Bowl area, maybe one a week, but we are unsure as to how far they get. There is a dangerous side hill and landslides are problem.

ESRD spoke with an outfitter regarding the North Ram trail loop, currently non-motorized. It was noted that there is a steep grade that would be tough to manoeuver and some uncertainty of trail past that point. Not many people seem to be using it. It will have to be inspected during the summer months this season to determine if there can be any change of status.

Suggestion that the loop over to Cripple Creek could be used during the winter months was put forward. There is a side hill but it is doable. At some point members would like to see summer motorized from the Bighorn right down to Ram Falls. We need to be working more on creating access loops from area to area. Long term plan would be to connect more trails and discussions following that idea.

### **Guide/Outfitter/Trapper Sites**

There have been some complaints coming in regarding items left at these sites. What is acceptable, especially in the deep backcountry. Human waste has been an issue and sometimes having facilities around major camps can be an asset. Writing on rocks, rails left up, signs tacked to trees, plastic, wire, boxes, items nailed to trees, improper highlining, all seem to be pushing the envelope and not leaving the area natural. Our thoughts have been in the past to take any rails down and stack against a tree, everything else goes. The busiest area is the Cutoff Creek corridor, not so much Blackstone anymore. We are just focussing on hunting/outfitter, CTR groups for this at the moment and are asking for Committee thoughts. We have some policies on paper but it is back from the 1920-30's, so we are trying to develop some standards for this area. This could tie into the vision plans for the area.

This concern of items being left in the backcountry was brought up at the trappers meeting. The majority opinion from that group is that they don't need four corrals, sheds all over, nailing to trees, graffiti, and think it is not acceptable. Caches are found to be present, sometimes two or three with stoves, etc. under a tarp. Also felt not acceptable.

Comments were to table this item for the vision piece, maybe guide/outfitters can take pictures of the model sites and bad sites? Will help give some insight to those involved noting that standards have changed on tents,

etc, through the years. The Alberta Outfitters Association has struck a task force to deal with these issues and their Standing Committee representative will bring suggestions in from that group as well.

### **FOESA Update**

See attached update document.

FOESA and the Bighorn ATV Heritage Society: How to let the public know that we exist? Suggested that brochures can be handed out at the ESRD booths in Red Deer and Edmonton and admin will look into putting a link on the website? The May Long Task Force can add to the brochures that they hand out as well. Their brochures would need to be approved by Edmonton to ensure they coincide with the ESRD mandate. Edmonton is also working to get stronger language and messages out. FOESA may want to check with the Trapper's booths as well or may want to have their own booth.

### **TPR Bighorn Damsite Update**

*Current Status* – Planning is ongoing and this project is still priority for the GOA and the leading Ministries will continue to work with this group and other key stakeholder groups in its development because there is a public demand for a formalized camping facility at the Bighorn Dam that supports motorized recreation users.

*Timeline* – Because of the current GOA economic conditions our DM (TPR) would like to hold off putting forward a funding request for this project until spring 2014.

*Concept Plan* – The concept plan has not changed from what was presented last June, however we are currently conducting an internal review of an Environmental Screening Report for the project. If this report's recommendations would result in any changes to the proposed concept, these will be put forward to this committee for input prior to making any internal decisions.

### *Site User Survey 2012*

- 42 surveys were completed between August to October
- 91% of the groups surveyed were participating in motorized recreation
- Top attractions for the site were; trails, scenery, free/random camping, no regulations
- Support for camping fee if additional services were provided was evenly split
- Support for an OHV trail access fee was good at 33% strongly to 36% somewhat supported
- 69% of the 26 respondents who reviewed the proposed concept plan said it fully or partially addressed their needs.

*Survey Work 2013* – The project team would like to conduct more surveys in 2013 to help validate some assumptions on the volume and scope of recreation activities occurring at the Bighorn Dam site and in the region. These include;

- Overnight camping unit and day use unit counts at Bighorn Dam
- Random overnight camping unit count within the Hwy 11 corridor
- Hwy 11 monthly traffic volumes

*TransAlta Utilities / Bighorn Dam Site Reclamation Plan* – The Project Team and TAU are currently working on developing a project plan for reclamation of the Bighorn Dam lands that meets the project needs and regulatory requirements. The objective is to have an agreed upon plan ready for implementation when the project receives approval to proceed.

*Land Use Framework* – The Bighorn Dam is within the North Saskatchewan Region of the GOA's Land Use Framework.

- Planning for the North Saskatchewan region has begun
- The North Saskatchewan plan is being led by a different committee of GOA staff, however, TPR representatives on that committee are aware of and supportive of the Bighorn Dam.
- TPR does not foresee any concerns or hold-ups with the Bighorn Dam plan as a result of the North Saskatchewan planning process.

*PRA Trail Planning Workshop 2013* – All members are invited to participate in the upcoming PRA OHV Trail Planning Workshop and will be contacted when a date and location has been scheduled. We have compiled sensitive site mapping information for the target trail planning area within the proposed PRA and this will be used to help facilitate discussions with our planners and this group, focussing on the following:

- Input on setting of general trail planning and construction criteria
- Route selection within the designated area of the proposed PRA

Q&A: Was the determination of campsite locations based on access, topography and current usage? Some of the guiding factors that went into the layout of the proposed facility development plan for the Bighorn Dam site include; incorporating existing disturbance areas, topography, and wet areas mapping.

Concern was voiced that people come mainly for the trails not necessarily the camping. Currently the area is THE #1 riding area so the draw is already there and is foreseen to continue due to easy access, big rig access and a good trail system, noting that the trail system is definitely key to this proposed project moving forward.

Comment to perhaps survey the existing RV parks and ask what the draw for people includes.

Q&A: If funding is not approved will the operation go private? If new capital funding is not approved for this proposed project we may look into funding alternatives which could include elements of private sector funding or longer term development phases.

Q&A: Is there a possibility of conflict of interest with other area campgrounds? Not likely as it's viewed by users as too far to drive, camp and drive back to ride.

### **Open Floor**

- Thank you expressed to the representative responsible for leading on the letter to the Premier and the feeling is that it's made a difference. To get a response from the ADM himself is truly a big deal.
- ESRD put this Bighorn Standing Committee group forward as a success story for a GOA initiative.
- Regarding visual resource management, the intent is for all seven LUF regions to be able to access resources and to have scenic resource assessments done. This is to decide what is drawing people to an area. There are twelve feature classes; accommodations, ice walls, local attractions among many others. Reinforcement that now is a good time for the vision group to form.
- Question from guide and outfitter representative regarding an article in the Alberta Outdoorsman and the fact that there has been a lot of negativity regarding access restrictions in the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. It is felt that what is being mentioned is similar to the Bighorn Backcountry in that trails

are designated, etc. Does the SSRP result in increased no access? There are competing industries in that region – a trail pass option is to try to resolve access management.

**NEXT STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING – JUNE 6, 2013**