

Monitoring Standing Committee Meeting Summary

Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan

January 24, 2019 @ 9:00 **FINAL COPY**

In Attendance

Blake Christiansen	Lisa Schrader	Adena Earl	Travis Earl
Kevin Gagne	Tony Brooks	Jim Duncan	Kristofer Heemeryck
Jim Turner	Ernst Bergmann	Michael Doyle	Dennis Schafer
Rita Stagman	Tom Davidson	Loyal Ma	Lorne Hindbo
Rick Artzen	Jeremy Cooper	Jay Mills	Larry Frischke
Dale Marshall	Kerry Robertson	Lisa Avis	Grant Santo
Greg Nelson	Logan VanIm Schoot	Marla Zapach	Wayne Crocker
John Tchir	Paul Radchenko	Theresa Laing	Aliah Knopff
Jamie Bruha	Laura Raivio		

Chair

Wayne Crocker

Welcome/Introduction

Round table conducted. Dennis Schafer is now the lead rep with Tom Davidson alternate for summer motorized. Jim Turner is the new alternate for guides & outfitters. Marla Zapach is the new alternate for eco- tourism. Theresa Laing the new alternate for Clearwater County.

2018 Project & Activities Update

Overview – This is the first year we've had capital money and supply and service dollars to do work. Looked at a lot of maintenance pieces and the remediation at Rocky and Fall Creek. There were 56 crossings at Fall Creek to reclaim due to bull trout spawning importance. Worked on fishing access sites creating handicap access at Strubel and redoing the parking lot at Beaver Lake. Enhancements to parking at Birch. Garden thrones installed at Coral Creek staging and increased access to human waste management around Hwy 11.

Rail Trail:

Decided to continue where the trail was left off in 2014 at Beaverdam. Were able to build from Beaverdam to Harlech PRA. Started with field recon and decided on a route. Opted for south side of highway to alleviate

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

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highway crossings. Had to get all approvals, FNC, crossing agreements, etc. with the last approval not obtained until mid-Sept. We were ready to go but it started snowing were unable to start until mid-Oct. County grant provided bridge across Shunda Creek, currently looks more like a road than a trail but we needed it built up and high grade for multi-use. All drainage is in, 4 bridges and 40 culverts. Finishing this section connects about 30km of trail between Nordegg and Harlech. Next stretch will be to Taunton.

Connectivity:

Looking at Eagle Ridge and a longer trail along the ridgeline plus downhill mountain biking behind Nordegg. Connector into Goldeye/Fish Lake for non-motorized. Long term looking at motorized crossing south of the river, working with highways to work that out, to connect to motorized loops and connect with Meadows. Opportunities for Jock Lake and Gap Lake compartments. East we plan on continuing along rail line through Misty Valley to Phoenix Camp to Chambers. May be looking at Chambers for initial staging. Snowmobile and xcountr y skiing on north side as south has many established OHV trails. These are a broad overview of ideas for the future for multi-use through this chunk of the proposed PLUZ.

Feedback – looks really good. Trails like Eagle Ridge aren't conducive to motorized but the Rail Trail trunk is and the connectors.

Downhill mountain bike connector? Would need a road, which is there already.

Fair to say these are just discussions at this point and there will be a bunch more with user groups and residents before continuing on these side trails. Rail Trail was planned years previously. Taunton is a pinch point, bridge is about 275k to get the deck put on and safe to use.

Have been building off the concept plan and need a bigger planning exercise going ahead. 56km left of planning to do. Will be talking with Misty Valley and had lots of comments from those already using the current Rail Trail. Also applied for a DRS which will put a disposition on the trail itself, and this will protect it as a trail in the future.

Comment - Quite a difference from the trails we've built in the past that had to remain as wide as a side x side. Seems like quite an about face. Volunteers had to stop work and had companies involved, but they weren't allowed to go ahead. Oil companies have offered bridges and we weren't allowed to take advantage of that in the past. Answer - Some of those trails in particular had to be held off due to not knowing what was going to be proposed as Park/PLUZ.

Comment - Rep from FOESA/winter motorized did an assessment on the James Lake trail in the past and presented it in 2011. It's been planned and budgeted since then with FOESA but wasn't allowed to go ahead. Answer – Stoppages due to flooding, not good trail placement and other issues including waiting for the proposal. Also received no go ahead due to the fact that we didn't want you putting money into a trail that may get another land designation. The fact is until we have a decision made on the Bighorn we can't move it from there.

Question - Have you secured the bridges and trail on the Rail Trail? Rail beds are very sustainable, unfortunate that many of the rail bridges had been reclaimed/burned. Everything that's not private is on public land, the crossings are the big problem.

Highway 11 along Abraham Lake has gotten very busy resulting in many human waste issues. Pulled out around 50 impromptu toilets. Put in outhouses at higher density locations as well as upgraded access. Signage was torn in half, don't know if it's because people thought it was a park? Had to close a couple of spots where cars were going over the edge to the lake and can't get back up. Lots of bubblers getting into trouble and erosion issues. Increased the random camping capacity by about 50 sites along the lake, put in 2 outhouses at the British army camp and 1 garden throne at Coral staging and 1 at Allstones staging. Portapotties installed at the Bighorn Dam.

Trying to clean up some of those human waste issues. This has nothing to do with the Parks proposal, just had the money for work long overdue.

*Wayne to action comment – At Windy Point people are still driving up over the top. Need to block with big rocks. Need more do not feed wildlife signs also as tourists are getting right in front of sheep for pics and feeding them.

Comment – When we started the committee we talked about all these things before they happened. Feels now that we are just being told what is already done. Should be brought to this group ahead of time. Feels unfair that something is closed and we knew nothing about it. Answer: We had the intent to bring to standing but the October meeting got derailed and postponed multiple times as the proposal came. We received funding in May and couldn't do anything until Oct. This is a one-off as we had to get it done and couldn't wait until next spring or the opportunity would be lost. Comment – good to hear. Comment – if there's an illegal trail or people going around barriers we aren't going to bring it to the committee but will deal with it right away. As far as improvements that's definitely a discussion for this group. Any trails we just closed along the lake are not actually on our map and are not legal. Any trails actually on the map have been brought up with this committee.

Comment – At Canary Creek BHAS wanted to go in and fix the trail for motorized. There were no approvals for that. Discussions were had and it seems like what nature has done has made it a better trail than it was before. We were ready to fix and then got a stop work order. Answer - That was a decision by Steering with input from the Standing Committee. Cutthroat trout are in that creek and we just won't designate a trail inside of a creek. It is pit run on the bottom but it's still a trail in a creek.

Grants to BHAS & FOESA:

BHAS – Work at the Bighorn Dam got delayed due to weather. Still plan to go in mid-May if it's dry. FOESA are still in negotiations and have reapplied for the grant. At a town hall meeting last March GOA said cheque would be in the mail in a few weeks, nothing, then informed we had to write a proposal, nothing, then told we have to apply for the grant. That would be \$100k to be spent specifically on trail maintenance and that is not our focus. Campground maintenance and updates is FOESA. Proposal put together to utilize the money which had to be by next year, so tight timeline remaining. Request came in to put another toilet at Panther. We were told we couldn't have anything that was a new expenditure, had to be maintenance. Now have not heard back yet on that. Deadlines? Not strictly but we have until end of Oct 2019. Suggest to get a grant agreement in place and confirmed knowing there is an election coming.

Enforcement:

Statistics are widespread due to districts and jurisdictions so we have general numbers. Work was mainly patrolling, public safety, education. Huge increase in "floaties" on the reservoir and had to deal with that. We had 1 conservation officer and 6 Parks Rangers on public lands.

Used 1000 man hours and wrote 161 tickets around Bighorn Dam. One initiative is since 2009 the powerline at the dam has not been designated for OHV use. Signs were put up this year to educate the public. That area is a buffer to the Bighorn Reserve. First Nations rep had said the PHV traffic is down inside the reserve. Two reactions when stopping public there, you either get blown by or have people who didn't know even though they just passed the signs. July 1st opening on the other trails there doesn't necessarily fall on a weekend. People have put a ramp over the gate in the past to go in illegally.

At Hummingbird we find that the users are repeat and compliance is very high. Mostly friendly reminders.

Enforcement district goes from the Brazeau down to James River and west to Banff. Outside of enforcement we respond to vehicle collisions, assist with wildfire, injured hiker rescue, suicide attempts, water rescue, attended

the Nordegg OHV rally and Lodgepole rally. Responded to 4x4s (monster trucks) going into wetlands, quads into wetlands. Helped remove outfitters camp uncompliant with 14 day rule and Preacher's point vandalism.

Is majority of tickets access-related? OHV use but not necessarily access. Mostly insurance and registration. Not uncommon for someone to purchase a machine on their way out to the site. Liquor infractions.

Helmets? Compliance fairly good. Mostly people actively hunting and not wearing a helmet is the problem. Farmers going from one farm to another.

There was special event permitting for parks and protected areas – had Disney filming a movie controversial with the ecological reserve. Helped them find another spot at Preacher's Point which fit their needs.

General Updates:

Process for identifying trail designations and seasonal closures:

Question - Motorized feel we have not been following the TOR for trail closures. First question is why does steering meet prior to standing? Input is supposed to come from this group first. Answer - Most times steering are deciding on what we are wanting to ask the standing committee at the steering meeting. We then want to digest input from the standing and discuss again after. Method to obtain info from steering after? We are obliged to tell standing what steering agrees to or disagrees to.

Page 2 of the TOR– participate in development of staging and trails (cont'd), saying if a present location of a trail isn't acceptable we should be able to have the opportunity to move the trail to more stable ground.

Scope of steering and scope of standing in the TOR - proposals and decisions are to be made at the steering level. Advice comes from standing but final decisions are made at steering.

Comment – This sounds like a disagreement on issues and that the trail being discussed is not appropriate due to water quality issues. Comments - Creating an alternate route would involve carving out the side of the mountain. Could we not re-evaluate? Rep feels its' a flood plane not a creek. It will remain a seasonal motorized access trail due to environmental issues.

Comment - Reference to the Access Management Plan – recreational trail monitoring. Each criteria to be evaluated separately. All adopted trails have three months and should have measurements be taken for erosion. Answer - It's in a creek. When it's in the creek we cannot defend it. There is a lens on our decisions from all groups.

Comment – James Pass – lots of ways to do that trail and fix it up. Could put in proper drainage, cut down the hill, put a ford or a bridge across James River. Answer – We have to wait until the Bighorn Country decision is made and then that discussion can be reopened so that you don't lose on your infrastructure invested there. Comment – We haven't seen a notice in writing and timelines followed for repairs as per the Access Management Plan. Answer - It would take three months to get approvals alone, let alone get the trail on the ground in three months. Many changes have occurred since that Access Management Plan was created from larger OHVs being on the landscape to more steps in getting approvals. TOR also needs to be updated as things have changed since 2003. Comment – we are dealing with volunteers putting in a lot of sweat equity, if you make it too complicated you are going to lose your volunteers.

Some of the old Bighorn Access Management Plan is from when we actually had an Adopt-A-Trail program, etc, which no longer exists. We will bring back any updates on this and the TOR from the planning group. Standing will be consulted with the writing.

Comment – How to be able to go ahead with trail building/maintenance? Could the GOA pay volunteers to put a trail in or maintain it as we can do it cheaper? We can't get past the OH&S issues. It feels like you are saying to us that we can't be on the ground any longer because we don't have OH&S provided for us.

*John to take back to steering regarding OH&S for volunteers.

OH&S Act and related health and safety requirements that came in has affected everybody, not just volunteers. OH&S indicates any unpaid worker is considered an employee in their eyes. An organized group that's doing the work the workers are considered employees.

SAR is an example where SAR provides the WCB coverage for volunteers even though they aren't paid.

AEP is working with Alberta Labor to try and figure out how we can work through the system, but it takes time. It was unfortunate it came into play in June last year right at the beginning of the season. Really hoping there will be some clarity in place soon.

Comment – Should the group draft a letter to the GOA to work on this issue? Answer - This committee isn't a lobby group and would recommend we don't go that route. Our GOA rep is going through this OH&S process and she will take this feedback back to the table.

Comment – The frustration is that in the last two years the holding pattern and policies have killed our desire to help. When we look at all these forms we have to fill out now and dollars and hours that have been put in in the past it is defeating. Feeling like our hands are tied.

*John - take comment up with Approvals

Comment – Under our outfitters license and CTR permit I am required to do trail maintenance. Seems a double-standard.

Question - Can this work with OH&S happen before spring so we can have some hope? Answer - This piece should not be hindered by the election. Should be clarified by March 31st 2019. GOA rep is working very hard to make it simple to follow and have the outlines in black and white.

Comment – We are struggling with how to approach cleaning up the campgrounds in spring without being able to go ahead. We were lucky to have a director with a COR so we could do some work.

Comment – Delaying maintenance is also going to cause some enforcement issues i.e. people tying to trees because they are knee-deep in mud at the highlines.

FOESA Update

Stalemate due to guessing what's going to happen. James trails is on hold, stop work orders, don't know what we can do anymore. In a maintenance pattern until resolved. Feb 23rd is the annual AGM and banquet – almost sold out already. Excellent working relationship with AEP and will keep carrying on as best we can.

Bighorn Proposal

Had several stakeholder consultations and telephone town halls. Hopefully you've had time to digest and read through the proposal and this is the chance for questions.

Also asking for feelings about a user fee system – not part of the proposal but want input. Jamie – user fees have been discussed with the GOA over the years with many different groups. Not really something the GOA brought up but is listening to what the groups are asking for and how it would work. Would like your input. Not something we are looking at doing anytime soon. Under the public lands act we cannot charge a fee for recreation. The parks act allows for collection of fees but that is not the same for the public lands act. Some provinces and states have their own acts specific to recreation but Alberta uses several pieces of legislation to manage public land and recreation on public land. We have identified that we need these tools for recreation management.

(summer motorized) - That should be something that is a part of this proposal. You won't get buy-in unless you can show recreation management.

(winter motorized) – For designated trails in Park and PLUZ, describe what will be considered in both? (planning) – Common misconception is PLUZ means no access. All existing access are open until trails are assessed, open until access management plan is approved. Then they are brought to committee and sections would be closed. Also can be closed due to environmental or safety issues. Consultative notation on trails, doesn't protect it. West Country PLUZ means trails would remain the same for now. A group would be formed for consultation, made from users and industry, etc.

Struggle is money that is put into trails not in a PLUZ means there's no protection, no designations, no enforcement. If you want to build a good trail, use existing access if you can but make it sustainable so you don't have to sink thousands of volunteer hours into it to maintain it.

(planning) – The sheer amount of linear disturbance that's out there is massive. Goal is to point out the good areas to go, even though currently there are ten other trails.

(guides & outfitters) – the skepticism is from attending many meetings and having looked at every trail and watched most go away in the Bighorn Backcountry.

West Country PLUZ is an industrialized working landscape so not all trails can be designated, as opposed to Bighorn Backcountry. Designated trails are for recreational areas. PLUZ gets created, management plan gets built, and that's what designates your trail system.

All these trails will not be like the Rail Trail, that's just large for the trunk line. Branches and accesses are smaller and will have less usage.

Need more specific criteria on what is a designated trail. When is a designated trail going to be motorized or non-motorized? Need to make the clear distinction. i.e. grade, wildlife, area, etc. Can do that generically certainly.

(guides & outfitters) – Most trails in the Bighorn Backcountry PLUZ referred to zone 1 prime protection. Comment - Some feel that we decreased protection by allowing motorized to remain there.

(mountain biking) – definition of motorized and non motorized – will have to change due to electronic bikes.

(guides & outfitters) – What are regulations around PRAs, access with guns and wild meat. Which laws do you ignore and which are going to be enforced. Need to spell out in the plan about what is and isn't going to happen. (F&W) – it's easy to say no when it's black and white but if not, then it comes down to officer discretion. As

situations happen i.e. an emergency where someone is injured and a gun is not encased we aren't going to stop and give a ticket. That's when it is officer discretion.

(planning) – Hunting and getting meat back home, suggestions? Access specifically on some of the parks i.e. YaHa promoting outfitting but access is not there.

(hiking) – Asked at stakeholder meeting if there would be hunting allowed in David Thompson besides the issue of the road corridor. Don't believe Kootenay Plains would be opened for that. A lot of resistance comes from this lack of detail, the devil is in the non-specific details.

(Parks) – The Road Corridor Wildlife Sanctuary would continue to apply. The area that is currently within the Kootenay Plains Ecological Reserve would become a special protection zone where hunting would not be permitted. A 400 yard buffer would be placed around facility zones for safety, otherwise you can hunt. The change to hunting is less than 1% of the total land base.

Does that include other proposed provincial parks? Hunting would be permitted in the David Thompson, North Saskatchewan River and YaHa Tinda Provincial parks, except for wildlife corridors and facility zones.

Trapping? Yes it would continue.

(timber/fire) – For funding the West Country PLUZ is where the work needs to be done, will that be reflected?

(planning) – Not an even split but money would be provided both for operation and capital. For the PLUZ it's not a ton but more than is currently provided. Parks' existing sites would be brought up to standards, enforcement, etc. Parks put together their recommended budget and public lands as well. Was larger than allowed so was split from there. Don't have a percentage split as there are some shared resources.

(guides & outfitters) – Bighorn Park boundary – what has been planned for forest management. (timber/fire) – It is currently under agreement, the R11 management plan, its prescribed fire, pine beetle control, firesmart.

(timber/fire) – Approved prescribed fire plans are still there for Hummingbird and a piece left at 40 Mile working toward cutblocks near YaHa prov park. West of Nordegg and east of Bighorn Reserve? Some protection on Bighorn Reserve. R11 allows around Crescent Falls.

(staging areas/trail adoptee) – Why take YaHa Tinda area campgrounds and turn them into PRAs? FOESA has done all the work and raised all the money and are we going to get charged to use it now? Would not like to see the PRAs there at all. If they could have answered the questions at the open houses there would be less upset people. We've done an excellent job and don't feel we should just have to give the sites over. Need to keep OHV access if we want access for all, including older, injured, disabled people that can't walk that far.

(planning) – What we did put out is a proposal and what we are gathering is feedback. It is a proposal so if we didn't get it right we can look at changes. If we don't have this feedback we don't know.

Hummingbird – how come PLRA campgrounds full but not PRAs? Change to OHV use and horse use and allow for a trail network to access and leave campgrounds. i.e. perfect for that would be Ram Falls. At 7 Mile – FOESA had received letters asking to get locks off the gates. Thought we would get OHV and equestrian use there but it's a no.

Cutoff – we need more access for OHVs to allow access to these places that I've been able to see my whole life.

(staging areas/trail adoptee) – We have a captive resource there that people should probably pay to use but the present system is not working. PRAs are full along Hwy 11 but not in our country south. Our policy is no fee for use and expectations are to use it and leave it better than you left it, and it works. Need to re-evaluate your present PRA system.

Trail designations – scared about the open until not theory for the West Country PLUZ. AEP – only places like Fall Creek are completely closed but with a PLUZ there are options to reroute because we can have enforcement.

(staging areas/trail adoptee) – Want defined processes and decisions to decide on, not the horse before the cart. Trust is lost. (planning) – We hear repeatedly about lack of trust. West Country PLUZ would never become a park. Bighorn Backcountry is prime protection that's why we are proposing a park. (staging area/trail adoptee) – doesn't matter if PLUZ or park it seems like designate now and decide what we are going to do with it later.

(summer motorized) – User fees collected by GOA or associations? (planning) - Either way has been talked about, easiest would be GOA but other provinces do go by association. Conversations are about what would be best. A way to keep collected fees? It would be dedicated revenue that has to go back into the service that it was collected for. (staging areas/trail adoptee) – That's a lot of money if you are collecting by camper, auto, OHV license plate, what's to keep GOA from seeing that money and reissuing it elsewhere. Who decides the priority where it's spent? (planning) - That criteria and allocation would be decided.

(mountain biking) – Venting frustration on you guys, we as leaders of our prospective groups should try to dispel the rumors to our perspective groups. Get people to read the information and do the survey.

Are we educated enough? It's back to like when the Bighorn Backcountry PLUZ started. It's hard to want to be around for that all over again. It's the next generation that may not have such a good working relationship. 40 years ago we realized there was a problem happening on the landscape and regardless of who we give the protection too, hopefully they are both smarter and wiser than we are.