

# Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan

## Monitoring: Standing Committee

June 7, 2012

**FINAL COPY**

Super 8 Motel - Rocky Mountain House

### **In Attendance**

Don Livingston	Wayne Crocker	Gordon Sanders	Derry Armstrong
Laura Raivio	Roger Marvin	Robin McDonald	Brad Andrews
Simon Dyer	Don Rilling	Lonnie Earl	Darryl Bereziuk
Kevin Wirtanen	Dennis Schafer	Cal Rakach	Paul Radchenko
Dick Wymenga	Dale Marshall	Larry Frischke	Case Korver
Darcie Duffin	Trevor Tarnowski	Fred Wilton	Curtis Nichol
Kevin Gagne	Loyal Ma	Chiara Feder	Dave Finn

### **Chair**

Don Livingston

### **Introduction**

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

New Youth representative is Randi Duhamel, a grade 10 student from St. Dominic. New Staging Area/Trail Adoptee representative is Dale Marshall and alternate is Larry Frischke (FOESA). Still need representatives and/or alternates for First Nations and Fixed Commercial.

### **Activities, Enforcement, Signing**

May Long – the team was geared up strong with major support from RCMP. ESRD is no longer allowed to perform enforcement so we are currently banking on support from TPR and RCMP (RCMP has committed to twenty days of backcountry patrol). We have one guardian doing mostly sign maintenance and who will be traveling around with enforcement sector. Amount of people out in the backcountry on the long weekend was down and overall was a lot less chaotic and with less liquor problems. There was a less garbage with a couple of bad sites. Industry put about 50% more bins out. Unfortunately there were two OHV related fatalities at the Brazeau Dam and 7 Mile Flats. Overall lots of random site patrols were performed. We are seeing a change in the people when they know there will be lots of officers around.

Specs on Enforcement: 128 officers, 6900 people checked, 2200 OHVs checked, 694 tickets issued, 34 people arrested.

Hospital Injuries: Rocky – 36 OHV, 10 camping, 66 total activity-related for weekend

Drayton Valley – 6 OHV, 9 total activity-related for the weekend  
Sundre – 17 OHV, 14 camping, 55 total activity-related for weekend

Clearly stated to the Steering Committee that the Standing Committee strongly supports a guardian program to continue.

2012 PLUZ brochures were delivered to the majority of places prior to May Long.

ESRD had a booth at the Red Deer Boat and Sportsman's Show in March. There was a minor confrontation with a good reception overall. Most questions pertained to where to go, and we are seeing a shift in attitude to 'it's always been like this'. ESRD also had a presence at the Edmonton Boat and Sportsman's Show.

A request to erect a metal cross of 7' x 4' stainless steel on Coliseum was put forward. The main reason was as a symbol to protect hikers. This was brought up with Steering and it was suggested that there may be policy regarding what can be posted on public lands, but will have to look into that part further. Overall feeling was that it puts us in a precarious position. Might be opening the door to a whole variety of things. Question: Will it be grounded? It can be a draw for lightening which would be very dangerous. Comment: Agree we need a policy. We are seeing more plaques along highways and more in the backcountry as well. Plaques are one thing but a 7' structure is quite another. Alternately may be looking at trail markers along the lines of 'Passport to the Rockies' that would be more pleasing to look at. Comment: Feelings that feedback would be mainly negative. This issue has come up in the south as well and they've been consistent with saying 'no'. Question: We are seeing more and more crosses on the highway, does Transportation have a policy? They have something but we are unsure of specifics. Consensus is leaning towards not approving – let us know if you have some strong feelings in the near future. Question: Would a kiosk for plaques be appropriate? We will have to look at that as well as park benches as a memorial. The downfall of that may be similar to situation at YaHa Tinda where we are dealing with too many requests for benches due to having two initial memorial benches placed there.

### **5 Year Review**

The review is at the Area Manager getting signed off. We have been talking of forming a vision group and we do want to do that, but this may not be the time. We need to see where ESRD is going so we are not making plans that could change by fall. Put forward for fall meeting. Gather your thoughts for that time and we may have some direction.

### **Edmonton Recreation Update**

#### 1. Organization:

- Consolidation of Environment and SRD is expected to precipitate further organizational changes.
- Consolidation of Government of Alberta judicial law enforcement responsibilities under the department of Justice and Solicitor General is ongoing.
- Deputy Ministers of TPR and SRD met April 25<sup>th</sup> and agreed to develop a strategy that would see accountabilities clarified between the two departments related to recreation service delivery. It was generally agreed that this strategy

will see TPR begin to assume a greater provincial outdoor recreation service facilitation/delivery role and would also clarify related planning and land management accountabilities (i.e. likely to take the form of completing the Recreation and Tourism Management Strategy called for in the LUF).

○ **Land Management Branch:** Mr. Bryan Osborne (780-427-4659) is new head of “Resource Planning and Guidance” section. The section no longer has direct aggregate disposition responsibilities, but has assumed departmental responsibilities for the Land Use Framework and is working to assemble capacity to support this function as a priority. Bryan is endeavouring to familiarize himself with recreation related matters and visited the Bighorn in advance of the May long weekend, Brule dunes on May 28th, and is scheduling meetings with other areas.

Current section staff:

- Bryan Osborne: Section Head, Resource Planning and Guidance
- Gerry Haekel: Unit Head, Riparian Management
- Jerzy Fularz: Research Analyst, Riparian Management
- Jake Bureyko: Research Analyst, Riparian Management
- Sarina Sibbio: Research Analyst, Riparian Management
- Sarah Froese: Land Planner
- Nikki Zwaga: Land Planner
- Louise Mongeon: ATRL Administrator
- Kevin Wirtanen: Public Use Planner

○ **Tourism, Parks and Recreation:** A new “Outdoor Development Branch” has been established in the Recreation Services Division.

Current branch staff:

- Bernie Macdonald: Director, Outdoor Development
- Manda Wilde: Program Coordinator
- Amanda Morrison: Program Support
- Kerry Robertson: Recreation Consultant
- Fred Wilton: Recreation Consultant, Provincial Trail Coordinator
- Ruth Rutteman: Administrative Support

2. Trails Strategy/Delegated Administrative Organization (DAO):

- ESRD and other departments are supporting TPR’s leadership in following-up on the Alberta Recreation Corridors Coordinating Committee’s recommendation to investigate the potential of a Delegated Administrative Organization (DAO) being established with the mandate to manage/operate a provincial trails system.
- TPR has asked that external inquiries on the matter be directed to the Outdoor Recreation Branch

3. Land Use Framework:

- Draft Lower Athabasca Regional Plan contemplates two new approaches to recreation management: developing a regional trails plan and Public Land Areas for Recreation and Tourism (PLART).
- Cabinet direction anticipated soon on LARP and subsequent plans.

#### 4. Events:

- SRD hosted exhibits at the 2012 Edmonton Boat and Sportsmen Show, Red Deer Sportsmen Show and Grande Prairie Sports Expo. Booths were well-attended with many positive comments.
- Edmonton staff (TPR) may attend the 2012 NOHVCC conference in Montana.

TPR – The recreation mandate has been redefined targeting primarily on trails, LUF and land stewardship. Focussing more on development in the province. Legislation providing trails act is in the legislature for the fall sitting to allow the province to designate provincial trails and provide guidance and control around those trails. This will include direction, guidance and funding in the area of enforcement with an agency called trail rangers, mapping, an education program, risk management as well as funding for planning design, construction and operation purposes. Will only include those trails that meet certain criteria. Also included will be lands outside the green area. Intention is to be funded by a trail improvement fee, initially placed against OHV users and then other trail users. Funding would be distributed through DAO which can received funds from outside of the government and disburse. After the fall legislature we will have more information on the details.

Comment: On May Long a representative was at the Bighorn Dam and asked around about public feelings regarding a surcharge to riders. Majority were to the positive.

#### **Nordegg Trail Plan Update**

Derry Armstrong has been working with Clearwater County and ESRD regarding the Nordegg Area Concept Plan.

Progress report: Why a plan? The Nordegg area has been a centre for trails for decades with happenings in last ten years showing an increase in use. There are currently other plans in the works for more projects, i.e. town site expansion in the north subdivision and the old town site, and infrastructure enhancement. Clearwater County is also working on the rail trail, including the Saunders/Alexo development node, and areas surrounding Nordegg. Essentially the purpose of the Nordegg Trail Plan is to provide better trails, mores trails and to cover the many different types of trail users. Basically leadership on this has been Clearwater County and ESRD. Trails will be built on a voluntary basis to which many individuals are already stepping up.

Planning area: This plan is focussing on area from Saunders to the Bighorn Reserve and North Saskatchewan River to Baldy. Nordegg is just the starting point. Stakeholder input is the driver for this process and local trail users were asked to sit down and tell where and what doing, and provide knowledge and suggestions.

Plan direction: The direction will define non-motorized trails, motorized/non-motorized trails and formal staging areas. These have been mapped.

Non-motorized trails would support all types of non-motorized usage including horses, xc skiing, hiking, walking and biking. These trails tend to be in areas close to town as users don't have the

range of the motorized group. These non-motorized areas proposed are mostly around Fish and Goldeye Lake PRAs, Shunda Meadows, Coliseum and the Beaverdam valley.

Motorized trails would be in areas encouraging motorized and non-motorized users. The plan has taken areas that tend to be multiuse already. Baldy Mountain, Brazeau Ridge (the area above Nordegg to the south), Haven Creek (north of Snow Creek, west of trunk road), Stolberg (south of the plant).

Trail connectors will become critical at some point linking Nordegg to the Bighorn Dam, Nordegg to Saunders/Alexo. Both will have people eventually wanting to get from an area to the town site without hopping into their vehicle. Also is the need for formal staging areas as currently there is only one located at Coliseum. These would have parking, an information kiosk, brochure dispenser and toilet. In addition to Coliseum, there could be one located on the trunk road west of Nordegg with a connector around Nordegg to rail trail. The other is Baldy. Another suggestion would perhaps be the opportunity to use the ranger station as a staging area. The final staging area would be located around Stolberg along Highway 11, maybe near the Fish Pond.

To go forward: This requires the approval of Clearwater County and ESRD (Standing involved) in a more formal way. Need stewards to try and provide impetus for things happening towards trails. The need for trail information, it would be very simple to beef up the information for the area. Ultimately trails would be designated under the PLUZ. Most trails are currently shown in the PLUZ but not Beaverdam and Stolberg. To have a draft plan put together we need key input. Public information provision is intended for this July/August at public info events in the Nordegg area. After that comes the agreement and the implementation.

Question: At Beaverdam is the use for motorized sorted out at around the PRA? Currently the trail still goes through and two crossings are still missing. The idea is to have a proper piece of trail going through. The intent is to physically build/repair trail east of Nordegg to Beaverdam and this needs to be looked at this year. Right now people don't know where to go. Do we cross Highway 11 or go east to Stolberg? Pressure will be there to extend the trail on the south side of the highway and east (is phase one). Comment: When dealing with volunteer groups when we hit public land we have issues involving safety and policies. There isn't a formal group yet but there is a strong desire. Need to sort out the current conflict between volunteer policy and ability to proceed in reality.

July 6 and August Long are tentative dates for the Nordegg open house.

Comment: Any trail changes lasting for more than a year needs Bighorn Backcountry Group agreement. Signage is a big deal as there is a strong need for 'go here' signs, not 'don't go' signs.

Noted that stewardships groups have held up their end of the deal, now we need the government bodies to go forward with their end.

### **Prescribed Burning – Blackstone Update**

Blackstone – May 21, 2012, using hand ignition, approximately 30ha was burned in the valley bottom and some on south facing hillsides. There was still extensive snow otherwise. Also burned was approximately 30ha on south end. The official prescribed burn area itself is about a 2400ha parcel which would be a two year achievement. In trying to ignite a prescribed burn we constantly fight the weather and have to watch the conditions closely to use the rare good window. Spring is very dry so fuels ignite easily but then the fire hits a snow patch and extinguishes.

Wapiabi Gap – conducted small test burn approximately 100 m long. Recent rain makes this site pretty much done for the summer.

There is a bottleneck area frequented by users for access to the Blackstone valley. We will have to have area closures including this site which will in turn close off a large area behind, so user groups need to be aware.

Question: What determines where and whether or not prescribed burning needs to occur? Capping units are dictated by mountain passes. In addition, Blackstone timber currently consists of over mature trees, the last big fire taking place somewhere around 1890-1910.

Question: Why is the decision to burning instead of logging? Logging does not emulate fire on many fronts. Burning releases many nutrient factors. The access and infrastructure dealing with logging are not legislated in this particular area and would have a negative effect. In R11 fire is the mandated tool. It is zoned prime protection has to be burnt.

#### Volunteers/Projects

Discussions regarding the Kidd Creek hill rail fence date. ESRD will be contacting volunteer groups for people interested in participating. ESRD is also taking lead to facilitate safety coordination. The project is the placement of a low, post rail fence to protect the hill, sheep and lookout. Probably will expand across two days. We will see if we can get access to a wheeled tractor with post hole digger. This will be a project intended to utilize members from all PLUZ user groups and all work together to complete a singular project. Hoping to work out a shuttle for the non-motorized volunteers or they could bike into the site. Equestrian could camp and ride their horses up. We need lots of hands and to show stewardship cooperation. This would be the one group project per year.

Anyone interested contact Wayne Crocker at ESRD who will then pick a date/weekend. Date chosen will be sent out to all of the Standing Committee members. Phase one will be to move materials in, phase two a construction day.

#### HB Archeological Findings – Darryl Bereziuk

### **The Hummingbird Creek Site (FaPx-1): A Late Period Stratified Archaeological Site in Alberta's Eastern Slopes**

Targeted exploratory field programs guided by high resolution landscape models (LiDAR) in support of the Green Zone Adaptive Management Program (GZAMP) have resulted in the

discovery of the Hummingbird Creek Site (FaPx-1). The site is located within the central eastern slopes of Alberta, and lies upon a remnant alluvial terrace that provides a commanding view of the confluence of Hummingbird Creek and the Ram River. Excavation conducted in 2011 identified a series of precontact occupations within a well-stratified sedimentary sequence. Radiocarbon AMS dates and tephrochronology results indicate the cultural occupations span the last 2,500 <sup>14</sup>C years. The artifact assemblage is described, and a preliminary chronostratigraphic framework is presented. The significance of the site to our understanding of Late Holocene cultural dynamics within Alberta's Eastern Slopes is also discussed.

### Bighorn Damsite Project Update/Summary

#### **Issue:**

- Public engagement and consultation with Albertans regarding the potential to designate the Big Horn Dam site (near Nordegg) under the *Parks Act*, and development of new facilities to deliver **on commitments in the *Plan for Parks***.
- Big Horn Dam is a popular area for random camping – especially for motorized recreation users entering the backcountry.
- The number of visitors to this area has steadily increased over the past ten years.
- We are considering designating the Big Horn Dam site as a provincial recreation area.
- A park designation would allow us to provide a staging area for backcountry recreation, develop facilities to support camping and motorized recreation, and improve public safety.
- We will hold a 60-day consultation later this year to ensure every Albertan has an opportunity to share their opinion on these proposals.
- Public feedback, site management, cost, and public safety will all be considered when making a final decision on the proposal.

**Background:**

- Key stakeholders are being engaged this summer to provide feedback that will be used to inform a draft facility development proposal. A user survey will also be conducted on-site to collect feedback from those that recreate in this area.
- Big Horn Dam is heavily used for random camping, with use levels of over 100 camping units on a regular weekend and in excess of 250 units on a long weekend.
- TransAlta Utilities, which holds the water development lease on the area, has historically had staff on site and has managed the recreational use. TransAlta has indicated that they will be moving off site starting in 2011 and will be operating the site remotely. TransAlta has requested that the Government of Alberta manage the camping and recreational use on site.
- Environment and Sustainable Resource Development field staff are supportive of TPR managing recreation on site, and willing to work with TPR in managing the surrounding land and the transition of existing land use.
- TransAlta has infrastructure on site that serviced construction camps and the maintenance of the dam site, which could be turned over to the department. Infrastructure consists of water system sewage system, electricity and some support buildings (condition yet to be determined).
- The Bighorn Dam is within the larger Bighorn Backcountry. The Bighorn Backcountry was established in 2002, and includes more than 5000 square kilometres of public lands east of Banff and Jasper National Parks. The lands are primarily administered by Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, though several parks under TPR's administration are in the area.
- Motorized recreational use is increasing and prevalent throughout the Bighorn Backcountry; however, there is a lack of formalized campgrounds to support motorized recreation users and a public demand for these opportunities.
- The Bighorn ATV Society has stewarded a motorized trail system in conjunction with the Bighorn Dam site, which had over 10,000 users in 2009.

**Field Day - Kidd Creek Project - July 28-29, 2012 (Contact [wayne.crocker@gov.ab.ca](mailto:wayne.crocker@gov.ab.ca) to get involved)**

**Next Standing – October 4, 2012**