

Bighorn Backcountry

Access Management Plan

Monitoring: Standing Committee

June 6, 2013

FINAL COPY

Rocky Mountain House Museum Boardroom

In Attendance

Don Livingston	Wayne Crocker	Gordon Sanders	Neil Godlonton
Laura Raivio	Paul Radchenko	Rita Stagman	Larry Frischke
Roger Marvin	Robin McDonald	Lorne Hindbo	Cal Rakach
Dennis Schafer	Kristofer Heemeryck	Kevin Gagne	Dick Wymenga
Dale Marshall	Case Korver	Greg Ottway	Loyal Ma
Brad Andrews	Chiarastella Feder		

Chair

Don Livingston

Introduction

Everyone thanked for attending the meeting. Round-table introductions were completed. No new members.

Activities, Enforcement, Signing

Two temporary closures have been put in place, one for trails south of the Bighorn Dam and one at Falls Creek/South Ram area outside of the PLUZs. The volunteer group in charge of trail maintenance south of the dam asked for a closure in the spring to try to minimize the damage that will need repair. The back side of the trails still had snow but the front had dry conditions. The Respect the Land trailer was set up on top of the dam during May long and ESRD was prepared to be able to convey the message about the trails as well as firesmart practices. The Bighorn Heritage ATV Society was there as well to talk about trail maintenance and sell memberships. The group has about a month's cap on their funds/labor ability and if it's used all in repairs we are never getting ahead with upgrading other areas. Message is if you have patience in the spring then there might be more trails available to use overall. The general public had been calling the Rocky office regarding the closures with only one complaint.

An interim enforcement strategy started on the long weekend. We will have two rotating enforcement officers for the summer on weekends but currently no OHV patrols yet with the closures. Two seasonal parks service rangers have been hired and are paid for by ESRD but supervised by TPR. These

enforcement personnel will team up with ESRD staff and get up to speed on the trails, performing patrols in the backcountry area, to have a presence and to deal with infractions. This year, enforcement personnel will be doing specifically PLUZ and public lands enforcement. The Bighorn Heritage ATV Society's letter and Friends of the Eastern Slopes letter sent in to the Minister regarding enforcement were a catalyst towards this interim policy and the plan is to have something in place permanently in the future. All of the peace officers have the ability to deal with public land infractions as well. Feeling of the group is this is good news!

Streamwatch isn't funding any of these positions but may be able to fund fall extensions for Parks seasonal officers in conjunction with Sundre Forest Products, for example.

Plans are to update the large signage on the trunk road and elsewhere within the PLUZ. Discussions are taking place with Bowden Light Horse Assoc. who wants to put signage in the Yaha Tinda north and south of the Red Deer River, mostly at trail junctions. Rock art trail system is very good for signing junctions. FOESA will be spoken with about various other signs as well. The trail group at Nordegg is also interested in doing signage there.

During May long there was a fire at Nordegg, at Lodgepole and may other starts. A portion of trunk road was closed and south of the dam and Falls Creek were closed. The amount of people out for May long was down 30-50% especially on the north end of things. Rig Street and west of Caroline was still fairly busy. Hummingbird and Nordegg had considerably higher compliance for OHV insurance, registration and following the rules. Local focus was on recreation related enforcement to be ramped up and more tickets issued. Vehicle stats through the Rocky check stop came from the traffic counter data provided by the County.

Statistics:

- 1099 violation tickets written for traffic safety, liquor, litter etc.
- 12+ enforcement actions under PLAR
- Over 400 vehicles contacted at Drayton check stop
- Over 1600 vehicles contacted at Rocky check stop
- Estimated visitor contacts including check stops 7500
- Over 1500 OHV's checked.
- 15 people with outstanding warrants.
- 5 STARS missions flown.
- 12 other OHV related reported accidents.
- 7 impaired drivers.
- Over 1700 pieces of educational material was distributed.
- Over 100 enforcement officers participated.
- 70 recreation related emergency room visits to the Rocky Mountain House hospital, with 46.5% being the result of OHV's (only 15.5% were alcohol related)
- Total of 167 emergency room visits for recreation related injuries in the area.
- 12+ recreation related abandoned fires reported.
- 14 industrial garbage bins placed by industry for public use.

- 200+ verbal warnings.
- Item of note – there was 104 abandoned campfires in the Southern Rockies

(charts attached)

Question: Strategy for finding and dealing with problem campsites? Helicopter patrols took place of known problem areas, the task group would meet and then they moved resources to those areas. Under PLAR there is legislation to combat the problem of litter at campsites but the trend seems to be towards better compliance. The general public is helping out and pointing out those who are not doing things properly.

Question: How many violations being given out go to court? Every ticket in the PLUZ goes to court right now because of PLAR. 12-14 of the tickets given on May long will go to court this time. Hoping the specified penalty legislation will be getting signed off to allow for tickets to be given similar to a parking ticket, you get it and pay...no court.

Question: What is the trend as far as big 4x4s? Definitely they are fewer but bigger. Either users are going somewhere else or are changing to quads, etc. You see custom built rock crawling machines now, if it comes off the trailer they are getting a ticket. County enforcement know those rules inside and out. The impact of these units going through the bush is huge but there is not as big of groups as in the past. No real push back on the falls creek closure, some units parked outside. The fine for going into the closure can be up to \$25000 max, so pretty hefty. This is being communicated on many of the user websites.

Trails Delegated Administrative Organization

BHAS and FOESA both wrote letters into the province expressing that now is the opportunity to move ahead with the Trails DAO. The DAO is not going to fix everything overnight but we are hoping this fall to get the act into legislature. Tourism, Parks and Rec has been having open houses for Battle River and it sounds like quite a bit of discussion is happening at the ministerial level. Trail mapping is happening. This is five years into the project and it looks as though the fall legislation could happen. Battle River should be done this summer and should give more leverage to the act getting to the legislature in the fall. Lakeland County also had a stakeholders meeting to discuss the issues and a trail plan. DAO would be province-wide. It's an arms-length organization from the government and funding comes from different formulas. We are currently looking at having a trail enhancement fee on top of registration (OHV). It would be collected by the government and would be specifically earmarked for the DAO. How do the groups get the money to do the work? Through a granting application process (this is not completely designed). Liability has always been an issue and this would take that responsibility off of the shoulders of the volunteers. If something becomes a designated trail then the liability is looked after through the DAO. Trail organizations would have the power to have a trail ranger looking specifically for passes. A trail group would be able to ask people to leave if they don't have a pass. Would the Bighorn Backcountry group lose the power to decide what trails go where? Not necessarily but we would have to see what happens.

Staging areas will be tied into the trails, however camping sites are a separate entity. Comment that the number one concern from the public seems to be the camping. That is a bigger picture item that is not dealt with in the DAO. Locked PRA sites with no one using them were suggested to be opened up until reserved. Many PRAs have changed to group use only because when open to the general public they are not being utilized. Can we look at having the registration fees adjusted to less money to attract more people or open it to the public? General recreation pressures on the public land will have to be addressed once this reorganization within the govt. is completed.

BH Vision Workshop

The workshop went well and allowed for some direction on where to go regarding taking steps to plan for the future vision for the Bighorn Backcountry. The day started with where the group came from and the focus on the IRP. Now with the Land Use Framework it may open up some other opportunities. Next we looked at where we have progressed and people's thoughts as to where we want to be. It became apparent that we haven't strayed too far from what is the original intent. Prior to the meeting today a summary of ideas was sent out. Ultimately we are looking for a one sentence idea of what the proposed vision should be but this current one contained in that summary has not met the target. After a summarization of the themes, we looked at what would support or hinder us from achieving our goals. Main themes cemented some of the conversations such as borders and looking outside the borders to achieve our goals, trail connectivity on a sustainable trail, new boundary may be looked at to make it easier to follow, facilities, hut to hut experiences, user fees that go back to the resource, adequate enforcement and funding, connections with community stakeholders that have a balance between users and natural resources.

The themes are definitely on the right track. We seem to all have pretty similar ideals with no really polarized thoughts coming forth. ESRD will set up another date in the fall to continue this exercise.

Comment: Are we doing anything valuable here without the LUF in place? Can we say we are protecting the natural areas and still use them? We can certainly minimize the impact. The more info we can bring in, the more input we have into the Land Use Framework. Having the help/hindrance information will allow us to move forward. Objective is to have one voice/one vision of what we would like to see.

Comment: LUF is going back into the Livingston IRP and hastily all the stakeholders got called to go through the report. They now have a timeline of the end of June to get that submitted for the IRP. What we are doing here will help us get a step ahead of this process for when we are presented the IRP for our area.

Comment: If we are to maintain the status quo within the PLUZ we really need to step outside our boundaries and create that good usage outside of the PLUZ. There is a need to have the opportunities elsewhere so the pressures aren't so great. Do we have a say outside the boundaries? We can present the pressures of the Bighorn Backcountry to the groups who will be planning/maintaining outside of the

borders. Can we request for the Standing Committee to be given the status we have now to outside the borders? Some companies are looking at some access to IRP at the moment. Some participants from here currently sit on those groups as well. Hopefully it will be a bit of a natural progression.

Outfitter Storage Containers

ESRD received a call from an outfitter regarding the possibility for bear proof storage in the Bighorn Backcountry.

Benefits: keep bears out of camp supplies and horse feed when guiding, reduce the number of horses and trips required when hauling supplies back and forth at the start and end of the season, less horses would mean less trail use and less grass utilization in the valleys (less impact overall).

Negative: who would have access (only outfitters or the general user), esthetics to the natural area. If an outfitter is granted use of the container does that become his site specifically? Can and will others use it? Currently if permission is granted for an outfitter to use a site then we can hold them responsible for that site.

This discussion ties into a lot of other discussions currently taking place regarding updating backcountry standards. The standing committee will look at the bigger picture items and give input on ideas of what the standards should be for the next meeting.

Prescribed Burn Update

On May 11 & 16 the prescribed burn planned for the Upper Clearwater took place east of 40 Mile cabin. Conditions were very good to burn and total area was 269 ha. The goal of 80% crown fraction burn (the percentage of the tree crowns that were visibly consumed by the fire) was met and it was very successful. When conditions are good for wildfire they are also good for prescribed burning, the difference being that the prescribed burning happens under controlled conditions and all manpower or equipment needed is already in place. During May our area has a springtime phenomenon known as the "spring dip" when conifer foliage is drying out from losing moisture to the atmosphere, while at the same time not being able to take moisture in due to the still-frozen ground. This creates enhanced flammability on slopes that face the sun, while on east and north facing slopes, winter's snow is either still on the ground, or has just departed leaving the surface under the trees still wet and cold. This allows for a very safe burn as the potential for an escaped wildfire is much reduced.

Upcoming burns are the in the Chungo (177 ha), Hummingbird (552 ha), Blackstone (1912 ha) and Wapiabi (360 ha). To get the capping unit at Hummingbird this summer would be the priority.

Shared Project Ideas

- Signage at Nordegg. Maybe more suited to the stewardship group
- Look at a possible campsite halfway into Hummingbird from the trunk road. Potential development for RV/OHV staging with potential to tying OHV trail into Cripple Creek, Ram, etc.
- Look at possible trail from Ram Falls PRA tying to Hummingbird. Ram Falls campground is currently underutilized and has possible connection values.

- Eagle Lake outhouses and trail.
- James Pass trail. That would be more than a day and involve heavy equipment.
- Cutoff Creek tour

Decision: Look at the possible Hummingbird staging site and Hummingbird prescribed burn area, then travel to Cutoff to view those sites – 1 day – August 8 (Thursday)

Open floor

- Nordegg fire went into the mine site a little bit with some scorching, it did not get into any coal seams. The Rail Trail needs some reclamation as the fire was in that area and fireline heavy equipment used part of it. ESRD will be placing a counter to look at usage there. Clearwater County is performing more trail work coming east as well as a post and cable barrier to discourage people from coming into the mine site. They are looking at placing mine site tour info signs as well.
- Bighorn Dam, TPR is looking ahead at reclamation and the possibility of doing a less developed site than initially laid out. They will be doing more counts over the summer for usage.
- We have new “Responsible Camper” signage, brought to meeting for viewing.

Next Standing Committee Meeting – Thursday, October 3, 2013