

Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan Monitoring: Standing Committee

June 4, 2015 **FINAL COPY**

Rocky Mountain House Museum Boardroom

In Attendance

Don Livingston	Wayne Crocker	Kristofer Heemeryck	Lisa Schrader
Jim Duncan	Danika Medinski	Jay Mills	Michael Doyle
Gord Sanders	Rick Artzen	Dennis Schafer	Cal Rakach
Jeremy Cooper	Doug Ritchie	Jim Allen	Leo Fagnan
Lorne Hindbo	Don Scott	Laura Raivio	

Chair

Wayne Crocker

Introduction

Everyone thanked for attending the meeting. Round-table introductions were completed. Don Livingston announced he will be stepping down as chair and handing the reins over to Wayne Crocker. Don will still attend meetings and still be a resource for the committees. ESRD is now AEP (Alberta Environment & Parks) Doug King will be the new equestrian rep replacing Don Scott. Michel Woodman has taken over Roger Meyer’s position with AEP in Calgary. Rebecca Goodenough is replacing Kristen House for Tourism. Kendra Blin is away on maternity with Mike Veltri taking over as the rec stewardship coordinator and Danika Medinski as the contractor coordinator.

Activity/Enforcement Update

*May Long stats attached

Across the east slopes May long weekend wasn’t as busy. This year the number of contacts was up more than double to 15900 people talked to. Enforcement wrote close to 1000 tickets but that number is on par. More than 80% are traffic safety tickets. Liquor tickets were a small portion. Numbers of people out was way up from last year but we are seeing a change in behavior and it was not as chaotic. Garbage cleanup was good overall. The timing restriction at the Bighorn Dam had pretty good compliance, first year with timed closure at the Dam and Tershishner. Parks figured about 200 units were camped there. A lot of groups were around Rig Street.

A NOHVCC trail design course was attended by the flood recovery group and three AEP employees. It was very interesting and great training for re-thinking where to place trails, giving us a different perspective. Looked at a small portion of the trail systems in the lower part of the Ghost PLUZ and it

was an eye opener. User needs have to be addressed and thought about and we now look at trails differently. Take a look at non-compliant trails, why are they going there? What is the reason? We would like to get the volunteer groups for that same type of training. Also gained a new perspective on rock climbers and the fact that they don't need much for trail to keep them happy.

Have we looked into the idea of sacrificing wetland to the mudders? It's a tough one. It's a fact that some people want the mud holes. Currently a new wetland policy is being developed for the green zone. On the James Lake trail, for example, is this going to drain off. Is it an isolated area not draining into any other water bodies where we can let them play. We have a hard time with that and resource development needs to give advice on any area. McLean Creek was designated motorized but with no management plan so now it's not in good shape.

Why not have a mud hole at the beginning of the trail, people don't have to go far and can spend the day there playing?

Are there citations being handed out for wetland? Within PLAR are two sections. One is if you drive any motorized vehicle into a natural water body it is illegal. Here in the PLUZs if you veer off the designated trail it is illegal. Outside of PLUZs motorized vehicles have to go straight across if it's on an existing trail, with no playing. No soft banks, no up and down the stream.

A link was emailed out to the standing committee regarding the federal Canada 150 project providing 50/50 funding for trails. Due date is June 17th. <http://www.wd-deo.gc.ca/eng/18872.asp>

Signage Update

We were able to purchase a bit more signage including that for the May/June closures at the Dam and Tershishner. We have been fielding a lot of questions but few complaints. We also received budget for a backcountry service worker again this year so that will help.

Wildfire Update

Prescribed burning this spring was successful at Hummingbird, South Idlewilde and Upper Clearwater. The Hummingbird capping unit resulted in 38ha in two units. More to go but need pretty good conditions there.

In South Idlewilde the meadow was burnt for elk habitat - 2 units for 69ha

Upper Clearwater – the capping unit was burnt two years ago and this year another 95ha on the southeast side.

Hazard reduction burns were completed at the Bighorn Dam, Saunders, Meadows Cabin and Medicine Lake. It does not shut the area down, we get out there before the camping season to get rid of dead grass.

Did the fire at 40 Mile get down to the new reroute? Now above and south.

The PB program was successful so far this spring but shut down due the amount of fire activity in the province. It depends on the summer but will look at burning again in the fall.

Up to 77 fires already in Rocky area. Spreading Creek is now extinguished. No closures left on Glacier Trail but we need to check on closure signs up the Siffleur.

FOESA Update

Spring work was mostly putting up highlines and adding gravel. Performed cleanup at Bighorn Creek and put up more signs showing 17 locations on FOESA's area map "you are here".

In the process of working with Parks Canada regarding an expansion to the east and reroute of the Bighorn Creek after the flooding. Because it is close to public interface they are okay with looking at doing something there.

Some normally scheduled cleanup at Hummingbird is planned for July 4th, July 18th is the OHV poker rally and August 8th is the horse poker rally.

FOESA took over the 7-Mile campground. It will become a user maintained campground for now and would like to integrate both equestrian and quad use.

Comment - Looked at Ram Falls and Hummingbird areas and got a great education on the large impact equestrian has on a campground and trails and the management it needs.

Comment – Certain people have been tying to trees in the Panther PLRA. Rules are posted and highlines provided but they insist on doing that. How can we deal with it? We can do a warning and then have enforcement lay charges. Would like to see a contact number added to the sign with who to contact if there is a violation.

The wagon staging area is on the other side of the road and is covered by the PLUZ. We can probably encompass that and have FOESA look at looking after that area as well as the current PLRA.

Update on NSRP

Prior to election the RAC report hasn't been released yet. Still hasn't been released since. Don't know what's happening with it yet. It is fairly high on the list for the minister but not sure on a timeframe. Yesterday a group was set up to review all the integrated resource plans as well as a biodiversity group and watersheds group. For the Bighorn Backcountry is some/all/none going to remain a PLUZ or go to Parks? Unsure.

A representative emailed the DM and had given advice on work done on the landuse framework. Suggested that we don't need another park and they look at this group for alternate examples. He set up a meeting at the Hummingbird and gave the DM a view of some of the people doing the hard work at the volunteer maintained PLRA and then down the road at Ram Falls PRA which only had one person in it as an example of the current PRAs not working for the area user. It was a very positive discussion and posed some difficult questions.

What's important is that the people writing the policy are asking the groups' advice.

Upcoming Planned User Projects – One Window Approach

We have a one window approach with the flood recovery group and FOESA but have somewhat stepped away from it with FOESA and have learned that we need to get that back now that we have projects

between them and the flood recovery. Direction is to go through Wayne. Lisa will look after the sheep foundation process down south.

Backcountry Trails Flood Rehabilitation Program

This program is on year two. About 1400km of trail was inventoried in the Bighorn many projects were started on last year as far south as Canary Creek. Contractors are to contact Danika.

Plans and progress will be posted on the web and contact made to the CTR holders. Crescent Falls will have a new trail down to the river to keep the horses out of the PRA. Horses can still camp on the far side of the upper staging. OHV camping is allowed as long as they are not unloaded, they can unload only when going out on the trails. It was suggested that more posts be added to highline from.

Is the volunteer database up and running? The database is in the works for our program, but has been stalled momentarily as new staff has been tasked to set up the database. The contractor coordinator will update AEP at the beginning of July or when the database is closer to completion.

How many projects are requiring heavy equipment? Six. Heavy equipment is being used when there are major kms of reroute, not smaller projects. What is the conflict with water courses? Everything, all proper approvals are being undertaken. We do have a letter of advice from the Dept of Fisheries and Oceans regarding crossings.

Trails in Kiska/Willson, Ghost & Upper Clearwater/Ram

Our areas have changed so our approvals have moved south of the Red Deer River. It has now created a working relationship with Calgary and Lisa is now involved with the committee there.

Since the 2013 flood there has been damage to the dam at Klein Lake. It was initially dammed for fish but it didn't work out. They are currently looking at how they would contour the lake and the end result for the trail. Leave it as non-motorized or no trail at all? Or creating a day use staging area and allowing motorized?

Along Panther road there trails that are currently being used illegally connecting campsites in the Panther to the Ghost OHV trails system. We have identified a lack of signage and need to make a staging area. Potentially looking at opening up a site and a legal connector trail to the Ghost trails. Both are PLUZs and we can hopefully fix some of those items that make good sense. Multiple campgrounds are located along that road but people can't get anywhere directly from their sites. As well there is no place for people to park and access trails farther up the road in Dormer/Sheep. Hopefully the Ghost committee will be accepting.

The wagon trail will not be open to quads.

One contractor project is the Panther wagon trail. It will be moved up onto the ridge with a couple of fords making it a lot more accessible and sustainable. Work is projected for later this summer.

Can we collaborate with the equipment for other projects? The flood group is taking on the entire Dormer river trail to the Banff boundary and he will check. The wagon trail will go all the way to Brown's camp and then single track. Need to have equipment to construct.

Monument valley access to OHV was brought up before regarding opening a new trail up the valley and to a lookout on the hill. AEP will be revisiting this, looking at how far up the valley and exactly where up to the lookout. It was stated at the beginning of the creation of the Bighorn Backcountry that compliance could result in more trails being opened up and there is a tremendous amount of compliance there. AEP will be working with BHAS and the wildlife bio with info brought back to the steering committee. When the guardian had hiked in the trail was still pretty much there. It's a hard packed area and looks very sustainable. A voiced concern is that the area was heavily used by young rams there in the summers in the past.

When it was hiked in the trail was pretty much there still. It's a hard packed area and looks very sustainable.

The biologist would also like to look at winter trail use at 7-Mile and the moose population. Compliance there may be helped by putting some signage so people know where to access the trail when all is snow covered.

Wagon trail at Sawmill – discussed building the trail on the existing trail on Timber Creek and beyond. There are two other trail options that don't go through the river. One is in a relatively low area and one cuts further upslope. The upslope trail was cut because the meadow can be very wet. The proposal is to get around the wet area and get up to that upper trail, completely removing the wagons from the Clearwater River. The one in the lower area probably doesn't have the right ground for a wagon trail but we have to assess. Snowmobiles would be using the same trail after Dec 1st as well.

Information will be run through the standing committee this summer once recon is completed and a reroute decided. We are hoping the flood group can help layout and decide where to go.

Any thoughts to the idea of a summer loop by Eagle Lake and getting it out of the wet? Had a discussion but didn't move. Also discussions with Banff about cutting through the ranch on the corner but it's always been no.

Clearwater Trails Initiative

Initial inventory has been completed on the major routes and campsites. Put up virtually all of the signage for Sasquatch. About half of the signs say 'yes' this is a good place to camp and about 20-25 that say 'no' due to exposed pipe, facilities, etc. There has been no posting on sites that have been abandoned but not reclaimed.

The system consists of major arterial routes with a web of other types of trails. Looking at how you connect people with their campsites and a trail system directing them to where you want them to go. Luckily there's not a lot of creek crossings. The group is registered with Synergy Alberta which gives them recognition but means they don't have to go through a board. Members have been travelling promoting the Sasquatch program. The group did identify one area with a gravel staging and a mud spot for people to play that is not connected to a water source.

One of the biggest parts is right at the Clearwater River where there is three major pipelines coming up out of the river that do not have good trail. We need to have signage and a route for people to get down. Members of this group are stakeholders of that area, not interest groups.

Open Floor

- New, bigger side by sides are appearing, how do we deal with them in the Bighorn? Everywhere else is 65", we allow 72". Weight allowance is 1300 lbs. A 4-person Can Am is 1600lbs.
Comment - Would like to have transportation on board as far as allowing road usage. The issue should maybe be addressed provincially with recreational management if it's not an issue for us yet in the Bighorn but outside the PLUZ instead.
- **Timber Creek bridge viewing field day, date to be announced.** The bridge install and trail to Sawmill will likely be complete late summer (end of August); the contractor coordinator will let AEP know when we are approaching completion and we can set a date for the visit.
- **Next Standing Committee meeting THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8TH.**