

Monitoring Standing Committee Meeting Summary

Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan

June 7, 2018 @ 9:00 **FINAL COPY**

In Attendance

Rick Artzen	Jim Duncan	Kevin Gagne	Grant Santo
Debbie Ballas	Simon Dyer	Kris Heemeryck	Dennis Schafer
Rick Blackwood	Adena Earl	Doug King	Lisa Schrader
Jeremy Cooper	Travis Earl	Aliah Knopff	Rita Stagman
Wayne Crocker	Chiara Feder	Laura Raivio	John Tchir
Michael Doyle	Larry Frischke	Cal Rakach	Logan VanIm Schoot

Chair

Wayne Crocker

Welcome/Introduction

Round table conducted. New to Steering – Jeff Wright replacing Brad Jones for SSR. New to Standing – Aliah Knopff is the new alternate for Hunting & Fishing

Activity/Enforcement Update

See attached May long weekend stats.

*Note – Only a few charges were in the Bighorn Backcountry PLUZs as those trails are closed at this time of year. The vast majority occurred east of the Bighorn Backcountry.

Enforcement

May long was somewhat subdued comparably. Relating specifically to the COs and Parks Rangers, it wasn't as busy for infractions or serious accidents. Within the PLUZs the Bighorn Dam was busy but trails not open. Put up signs to the east of the dam access road to remind people the area is closed. No access there even though the trails are there and eroded.

More on Bighorn Backcountry trail monitoring: <http://aep.alberta.ca/recreation-public-use/recreation-on-public-land/bighorn-backcountry/monitoring/default.aspx>

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Infractions were mainly no helmets, no insurance/registration, warnings and violations for going into the closed trails. RCMP had two quads take off, they were able to stop them. It's busier there in July after the trail open.

Had 48 infractions in westcountry as a whole, half were at the Bighorn Dam. Calculated 133 officer hours for Kiska/Willson, 20-30 hours around Clearwater/Cutoff. Outside of the Bighorn was busy with random camping at Rig Street, Southfork and Burntstick. Task force check stops were educational and enforcement. Were also up in a helicopter and found a couple of quads in a closed area so landed and spoke with them.

In the south part of the PLUZs there were more family groups. No spots available at Eagle campground.

Grad parties in Southfork cleaned up after themselves. There were stolen vehicles, impaired driving, a drug dealer soliciting people as they drove by. Lots of open liquor. Warnings for driving in and out of the creek.

Sasquatch program is working well, using approved camps first but still packing into the unapproved when busy. Signs are working but need more education.

One death, dirt bike in south region, not alcohol related.

Activities

Within the Bighorn – FOESA and BHAS received \$100,000 to do work. Met with BHAS regarding the Bighorn Dam, mainly planning restoration on the trails. We plan on dealing with the human waste in the camping area. Looking at putting in permanent outhouses or temporary in the mid term. Along the corridor Allstones, Coral staging are way overcrowded and have outhouse issues.

Outside of the Bighorn we completed last of the work on Rocky creek near Cutoff for restoration of trout habitat. Restoration planned at Falls creek, starting in July.

Clearwater County is on a joint project to continue work on the Rail Trail from Nordegg to Rocky. Right now it is complete to Beaverdam. We are looking at continuing on with an alternate route from the old rail line to join Beaverdam to Harlech. Taunton trestle, 1 ½ miles from the old Saunders site, needs very little work to be done to it. Spectacular views, history, a lot going on for this trail. County received a \$125,000 grant for the Rail Trail and we are trying to make the most of the money towards this trail and see how far we can get. Multiple partners, will keep you updated.

Q – At Taunton, as you come up to the trestle it's a sharp slope, need to put in a new trail so people have something safe to reach the trestle. Connectors from staging and the existing road.

Will need to look at the whole picture and look at many of these other trails heading off. Will be talking to stakeholders about multiuse and single use trails and preferences.

Biggest challenge would be for the horse and wagon. Will see where we end up, may not be able to accommodate all usages. Ideally it would be year round for motorized and non-motorized usage.

Q - Have you done a full infrastructure needs analysis on the whole rail trail? We have the start, we are updating the concept plan as we go and are focussed on the section between Beaverdam and Harlech this year. Recreation Management in the region is balancing between remediation of OHV damaged areas and new trail developments.

Update on the status of the Bighorn

NSRP process is underway in earnest. Input on the RAC closed May 4th. 4000 people viewed, 1444 actually completed the survey. Received many written submissions. Incorporating all of the feedback into the draft. This draft includes all of the NSRP from Banff to the Saskatchewan border and Bighorn is a big part. Would like to see a draft out in July and will illicit comments publicly on the draft and then proceed. There has been an enormous amount of volunteer work in the Bighorn and they are very conscious of that.

Q – Meeting local needs – there’s a component from national travel to local travel. There may be a need for timing for the different user groups. You certainly need local support first and then you can look regional and national. A – Historically recreation and tourism has been left off to the side. Now we want to make sure it’s formally built into the process of planning. Culture and Tourism is very engaged in this plan.

Comment – We are at a real threshold on the level of trust, watching how other regions went through the process. We were well represented in the RAC report. Have gone through the legislative steps and have seen that being done, the message is “here’s a chance to build trust”. The trust is gone and this is the chance to build.

Comment – A lack of resources this area is getting needs to be managed. People are worried about losing their trails but we’ve been told that won’t happen without it going to a Park. Feel the PLUZ designation is somewhat of a deterrent to tourism. Could see status quo on trails with some infrastructure.

Further east of the Bighorn is a lot of issues and lawlessness. Within the Bighorn it is quiet and respectful. Unmanaged recreation outside the PLUZ needs our attention.

Comment – What I found in the RAC committee was that lack of trust was the big thing and I think what you are saying is there is much better compliance in the PLUZ. I feel you need to think within the plan and have a serious look at sustainability and infrastructure in what we have.

Comment – Sledged in eastern Canada for 480 miles, they have used their infrastructure in the right places and everything set up to deal with the masses coming in. Met with some of the organizers and we are so far behind. It needs money and infrastructure, it was a good learning opportunity for me to see what’s possible out there.

Comment – People like what’s happening at Rig Street and are asking to do more areas.

Expansion of the Bighorn Mandate to become a sounding board for recreational planning outside the Bighorn

We are putting together a process to consider new applications for trails, staging areas, etc. outside of the current PLUZs. Going back to the 2013 visioning, expanding the mandate east was one of the changes considered for the next 5 year review of the Terms of Reference. What we would like to see happen is to use the current committees, standing and steering for providing input and perspectives on applications outside the PLUZ. For now we would like to start off at the scale of Clearwater County to get the process started if we expand the mandate and we may need to consider renaming the committee. We are already sharing info on what’s going on outside the PLUZ. Our proposal is to expand the groups mandate and look at current participation and members as we may need to include additional members to ensure broader representation. As applications come in, a rep would bring it forward on behalf of the stakeholder and it would be presented here, other ways to get it to the table would be through Resource Management or Approvals bringing it to the table [but not a TFA (temp field authorization) application]. The intent at the standing committee would be to get an understanding of the competing interests and conflicts and does the application fit with the bigger vision.

We don’t want a trail that isn’t comparable to what we have in the PLUZs. We want this group’s interests and also involve other groups as we go. Want everything brought to the table and see if further consultation is needed.

Once approved and built the trail will be designate and added to something like the current Bighorn Backcountry website/maps. We could also then put a DRS designation on the trail and it becomes part of the trail inventory. If

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a PLUZ is put in place west of Rocky then the same leaders are in place to help manage it.

Q – There are no guarantees we are going to be able to maintain motorized within the PLUZ, so what's to say the same thing wouldn't happen after all our time and effort in a new PLUZ?

A – You feel like you've been burned why go back to the fire? The flip side is I can make the decision myself, or I can make the decision with your input. We are open and transparent in the group and are able to have the conversations. Can't guarantee if motorized will stay in the same spots.

Q – So at Canary we can't look at other routes? There are other routes there. Same at Rocky Creek, at Falls Creek. We are sitting in a group but Canary is gone, Joyce is gone, Tower road is gone.

A – Those were discussed and decided, so essentially the same level of input and the sounding board is the opportunity here.

Comment – Need to expand that conceptual plan outside the Bighorn and put it down on paper so when these requests come in we can lay it over top and see if it fits.

This committee currently doesn't have industry at the table to would have to include as we go east. Would have to expand on the First Nations as well to include O'Chiese/Sunchild/Paul.

Comment – I think there's an opportunity and a need to figure out the principles on multiuse trails and create an overarching plan. A – It starts with footprint planning. Risk is we've been in paralysis waiting for the regional plan and we can continue to do that, but the reality is we would just keep stacking up applications with no movement. The way to fit those pieces into the plan is to go ahead and then fit those pieces into the overall plan and see that those pieces get in there.

Comment – Can do some planning but don't have to complicate it, a stick plan for connectivity. Wanting to know whether you are willing to do this, and then we can have those discussions. Want to see connectivity between nodes, including day use, and how to put something on the landscape that's lasting with dispositions so we can maintain that route. Can't have those discussions currently here because our mandate is Bighorn Backcountry only.

First step is to rewrite the Bighorn Access Management Plan, make changes to reflect the bigger area, rename the group. Would like to see another name besides Westcountry. Have to look at the mandate of the CTI and the mandate for expanding Bighorn and make sure it's not treading on each other. Would have to have more meetings than three/year as well.

Comment – It's a great idea but concerned it's such a massive area. Meetings aren't free and industry would have to be involved. Are worried about the undercurrent about Parks and do they still want the advice of the Bighorn committees. With two massive geographies it may be better to have two committees.

Comment - Principles need to work together, i.e. forestry puts in a temporary road which has great views, but it may not be a good place for continued use of campers and trail users due to wildlife issues, etc.

Comment – The RAC committee was given the Terms of Reference and we sat down and determined the % vote for consensus. Felt it was a good process.

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Volunteer update

Developments regarding volunteers, OH&S legislation changes. There was an incident in southern Alberta in October of last year involving a chainsaw/tree and led to a lot of policy reviews. Volunteers are to be treated like employees and groups are to have all training, OH&S and legislation. Currently we are not meeting that legislation. Parks has a stop work order until further notice. Ourselves, we are telling volunteer groups not to continue any high risk work until further notice. Needs to be sorted out quickly. Is being worked on and we think we have some solutions that may work. How are we are engaging and working with stakeholders will be in alignment with Parks. If a group has their own WCB and OH&S coverage then it's easier to have a look at that program, bring it to our OH&S person and if it meets or exceeds our own, we can work with that group.

Comment - AOHVA has an OH&S program and once our end is solved will share with the others. In the end it's inconvenient but hopefully it saves some lives down the road. Many of our groups have already been using the safe work practices, this is just formalizing it.

Because the association with this individual and Parks was dual, we were tasked with setting the standards. We've learned from the processes, volunteers are very passionate and sometimes go their own way, so there is a process. We are working with our volunteers groups developing a tier 1, 2, 3 (3 being lowest danger) regarding classification of what is high risk work. We are putting HAC-Rs forward and if in agreement we sign off the HACRs and safety plan. Parks is piloting the process and if FOESA is approved, for example, then they are approved with AEP as well and don't have to go through the process again.

FOESA update

Annual fundraiser AGM and banquet set a record for the amount of funding raised. Spring cleanups preformed and first was 7 Mile/Cutoff. At Bighorn Creek/Eagle/Panther, what used to be a full day job is a half day now. At Cutoff the biggest job was cleaning up feral horse droppings! Have one director who has a company with a skidsteer and the OH&S requirements so could use that there. At Hummingbird the highlines needing rings and gravel have been cancelled for now until we get more directive from AEP. Volunteers are the backbone of the organization so something needs to be decided soon respecting Bighorn Backcountry future projects and also volunteer work to be completed.

Prescribed fire update

Before May long went into Hummingbird and after the long weekend into Wapiabi. At Hummingbird we did the capping units behind campgrounds, across the creek and completed units, 5, 3, 2 and parts of 7. Total burn perimeters 150 ha.

Wapiabi – May 22nd started operations, May 30th got snow but ended up with 835 ha total and a nice capping unit. Achieved the 80% crown fraction burn.

Monitor with cameras linked directly to the duty officer desk. Met most of the expectations for prescribed fire for the spring.

Q - Anything around YaHa Tinda?

A - There was a 2.5 ha wildfire there and Banff Parks was doing some habitat burning for bison.

Open floor

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Round table to test consensus on expansion of the Bighorn Mandate to Clearwater County

- County would certainly support expanding the committee. Have always kept CTI in perspective as well, there's so much experience and skill sets there. Industry has been at the table there all the time. GOA can see an evolution of sorts, in that industry is getting a bigger view of the issues because of CTI, also the Alberta Energy Regulator and Sundre Forest Products are getting a bigger view. Have such high technical databases too. CTI struggles to figure out their role as well. CTI is a society so would like to make the best use of the people there to fit in with what we need here. GOA is not the lead in CTI whereas with this group GOA is the lead. Could invite CTI for the visioning pieces.
- We are speaking about projects outside of Bighorn Backcountry, would the group like to see presentations about what we are doing for projects and share in that for the next meeting? Yes.
- There has been a lot of work with industry lately on what to reclaim or does it fit into a bigger picture.
- There is a hiking club that has been founded, Terrafirma, wants to lead monthly hikes. Rocky Mountain House Hiking Club, leading twice weekly hikes. Mountain bike club and OHV groups are there. Also a new club formed last year the Rocky Mountain House OHV Group. GOA is seeing an influx of clubs and requests due to people thinking if they don't get their stake in they'll lose their trails.
- The big question is, if the mandate was to expand, how would this group dovetail into that plan? A - This committee would move into sub-regional planning. Also if the Bighorn goes to Parks would the standing committee still have any input? In discussions, the Bighorn advisory committee is still seen as a part of the process. With the more use out west, we are getting pressure from the user groups for more infrastructure.
- Would like to utilize the plan created a few years back that Trevor from Parks made, was well created.
- Using this process to make plans that are conservation-minded and address the needs of the community for recreation is critical.
- Around Room – good idea to pursue a wider mandate? Full consensus on supporting it.
- Once the draft plan comes out would you like to have a discussion with Bighorn and Strategy Division? Yes.

NEXT MEETING THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4TH.