

Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan

Monitoring: Standing Committee

October 4, 2012 **FINAL COPY**
Super 8 Motel - Rocky Mountain House

In Attendance

Wayne Crocker	Gordon Sanders	Neil Godlonton	Rita Stagman
Laura Raivio	Robin McDonald	Brad Andrews	Greg Ottway
Simon Dyer	Don Rilling	Dennis Schafer	Cal Rakach
Paul Radchenko	Lorne Hindbo	Mike Horembala	Eric Ebl
Dick Wymenga	Dale Marshall	Fred Wilton	Loyal Ma
Chiarastella Feder			

Chair

Wayne Crocker

Introduction

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

Youth representation attended with outdoor education teacher Mike Horembala of DTHS and student Eric Ebl. Intent is to bring a new student to each meeting and bring back the information from the meetings to the rest of the class for discussion.

Put forth to have Lonnie Earl become the official alternate for Fixed Commercial and agreed. Concerns raised over lack of attendance by Winter Motorized. Still no representation for First Nations.

Activities, Enforcement, Signing

May long – ESRD has been removed from enforcement capabilities - no tickets issued by them. It was a quieter spring and may have been due to the threat of fire ban. Still lots going on however, with deaths, injuries, garbage; but somewhat less. As for the task force, we were one of the key members so with us being removed we are unsure of the integrity for the future years. RCMP are still interested in doing patrols. We had people available to show them the areas and the MOU suggests we share equipment and access. People at least got to see some enforcement. There has been an increase in illegal activity seen and an increase in complaints. No one has really picked up PLAR entirely, using some sections here and there. Will the task force continue? We will be asking the remaining task force group if they still want us in with no enforcement abilities. We could be looked at as a liability. Solicitor General is looking into this

but we have no timeline. Lands Division is being broken apart into functions so there is a lot of question as to our role in recreation at all. We were told by Sol Gen we were removed due to a safety issue. Management without enforcement is proving very tough. Few F&W enforcement were out for long weekends, mostly RCMP. Suggestion from representation groups to draft a letter from the Bighorn Backcountry Standing Committee, Monitoring Group to the ministers to stress how important this really is and the impact this is having. Unfortunately our recreation problems are unique in the Clearwater/Southern Rockies/Edson areas from the rest of the province and maybe not seen as important. Is this just a push for enforcement to go to TPR? Not necessarily but no specifics. Parks has seasonal enforcement but is somewhat of an anomaly.

We were asked to look at Tershishner area and it's an absolute mess. People are getting hurt. Trails are supposed to be managed by us but there are no volunteers for maintenance. What do we do? Sign for timed closure? Frozen ground conditions only? Now, having said that, is there any value in just signage. With no enforcement why bother with a sign? What about public safety? This is a local area priority because with the current departmental reorganization very little direction is coming from corporate ESRD regarding recreation on Public Land.. Suggestions? Every year that goes by with no maintenance it gets worse and worse. Even for hiking people don't go west anymore they go to Kananaskis because of the conditions of our trails. We are missing key elements; no funding, no enforcement, lack of volunteers, no mandate. FOESA has found more funds but need direction as to what they are allowed to do. Can we just fix one area at a time? What about high erosion years? FOESA can't apply for all the money right away because permissions don't always come at the same time. Suggestion is to close trails for maintenance but give riders somewhere else to go during the maintenance.

Who can a body write to? The Premier? Govt. is supposed to be providing some alternative but nothing to date.

We can continue on with signage, education, maintenance, in hopes that this is a temporary thing. It seems defeatist but we have to be positive. On a local level we are still going to be doing what we can do.

Permissions for upgrades go to Wayne Crocker. Our relationship with all the volunteers is very prideful for us and it is a positive thing. Govt's minor role of giving permissions is a minor part of what happens in the west country.

Comment that it seems like the govt is not taking this recreation problem seriously. We've been stagnant for the last four years.

TPR – ideas are that fees would be collected to make the trails up to the higher standards and direct people to those trails as opposed to networking on their own. DAO is a method to channel the money to the reason it was collected. We need the legislation to back the DAO for it to succeed.

Any fear that the PLUZs will lose the status that they have? PLUZs are identified under the Landuse Framework so probably no change, but who will manage them may. PLAR is a good change as far as legislation goes as it's pretty clear on protection.

We've been so successful and the country has benefitted, we're not giving up.

5 Year Review – Vision for the Future

Delayed.

BH Dam

The project is still moving along as planned but it is taking a bit longer than anticipated to complete this season's field studies and getting the information required for the next phases of planning. We will likely have what we need to hold a trail planning workshop with the Standing Committee for the area within the proposed PRA at the next meeting in February.

Nordegg Trail Plan Update

Standing Committee was asked to look at and comment. Clearwater County had put the funds towards the planning and the staging area in conjunction with the rail trail plan. They have started construction at the main staging area in the industrial area and starting on the trail proceeding from there.

There was a comment from the Bighorn Backcountry Steering Committee regarding the detail of the map. Is this access plan going to be managed by us or County? Everything outside Nordegg is managed by ESRD and County manages in Nordegg. Some trails have a motorized and non-motorized conflict. Six or seven people from Nordegg were involved in the plan representing user groups, and they spent a session identifying trails being used and not used for certain reasons. A map was then created detailing the general zones. People want more signage and info on where they should and shouldn't go. Comment was that the map needs more detail trail by trail as this one is just to indicate the zones. Intention was that there was an opportunity to designate specific usage trails within that zone. Currently there is only one staging area at Coliseum and nothing else. Potential for other staging areas of motorized.

Confirmed there are trails for cross country skiing. Non-motorized designation would not allow for a grooming machine or trappers? Those would be allowed through permit. Any volunteer groups to keep trails open or have a fully funded system? Motorized tend to do a lot more trail maintenance than non-motorized traditionally so a fairer system needs to be worked out. Direct any questions/comments towards Don Livingston of ESRD.

Comments:

- Any indication of who will be doing the signing? Not yet. Stolberg area? Was industry involved in the trail decisions? Unsure.
- Highlight the most desirable trails and people will use them.
- There was some inconsistency with this map and the Bighorn Backcountry map so that needs to come into play. Won't some trails on the Nordegg Plan map have to be closed? Potentially.

- Missing from the map is also the FireSmart program areas. FireSmart activity will actually help with the trails in some of these areas.
- Map is showing a long term vision but needs to show what's happening right now.
- Page 3 third paragraph of the Concept Plan quoted. They want to manage existing trails not necessarily making new trails.
- How big of a future are we looking at? Will winter usage be low? Are we picturing too big? A lot of the trails currently identified are actively being maintained already so it looks like a lot of trails but it's not so much in actuality.
- Groups that do the user maintenance can use funding or apply for funding? Have to determine if it's in a PRA, county or PLUZ.
- F&W would like to see no increase in trails in the wildlife area.

All comments and suggestions should be directed to Don.

Tershishner

See comments from *Activities...* section above. We are going to address area as for the present.

Suggestions for a management response to these abused areas:

- Does it open people's eyes if you close them off? Do they ever get opened again? Take the case to the public that if you want this open you have to get a group together and funding and fix it.
- Can we make a priority list and do one at a time? Suggestion to do nothing, people will get angry and eventually raise a ruckus. If it's a public safety issue we may need to put up signage.
- Closing a trail would be due diligence and may force the public to question the powers that be as to why. This then becomes an educational tool and allows the committee to practice due diligence.
- This trail is sustainable with maintenance.
- Push for more volunteers? Hard to do because it puts more work on the existing organized volunteers when it comes to organizing and equipment.
- Why can't we get pictures of abused areas out in the open and educate the public? We don't want to perceive blame on just one type of user. Using pictures of OHV mess gets taken out of context and people think the trail is like that the whole way through, not just in a couple of sections.
- Can we use the closing signage as an educational tool and describe why it's closed and what you can do to help? Always put why it's closed. It's easy to close things, much harder to maintain them.
- If it's not effecting wildlife or the health of the river or a water body, why not just leave it? People want these challenging areas.
- It was mentioned that there was supposed to be an act regarding trails in past meetings. Nothing has been able to be brought before legislature on that yet.
- 90% of people will respect signage, especially informative signage. And if we were stop doing signage we would have a seriously difficult time getting caught up again.

Littlehorn

The volunteer for this trail is unable to counteract the damage being done by erosion on this trail. It is currently a timed OHV (Dec 1-Feb1) and snow machine (Dec 1-April 30). Due to

landslides, scree, etc. nobody has gone up this trail on motorized for a number of years. The Whitegoat trail is in pretty rough shape as well. Are we still wanting to classify this as a motorized trail? We should maybe rethink the designation.

Comments:

- We would lose the Sugarbowl as well if both trails were designated non-motorized.
- We are looking at the Joyce Creek trail as well as it floods out constantly.
- The trail behind Crescent Falls is causing problems as well as far as access. This one is being discussed between ESRD & TPR.
- Can we just use portions of the Littlehorn? We are proposing just to change the status. They've cut road in as far as it can go.

**Conclusion – have someone go out and assess. Trapline owner will check it out and report.

Canary

A group is questioning the Canary Creek Trail as it has been getting flooded out regularly. What is classified as sustainable? We believe it remains sustainable. Highways wash out and get fixed, same as our trails. Special thanks to the Bighorn Heritage ATV Club for all their hard work.

Note - In the future the ATV Society should try to get the trappers in an area involved.

OHV Noise

At one meeting we had spoken about decibels of noise. Any standards were put into the original legislation that included tire pressure, etc. That came from the description of OHV standards in the PLUZ map. Nothing stated decibel noise, just not excessive noise and to have spark arresters. There are standards that the manufacturers follow but these do not cover older OHVs.

At present, no one is testing for noise, TPR does not have the equipment for testing and there is nothing in PLAR.

Volunteers/Projects

There was a lot of volunteer effort this year with the erosion of the area behind the Bighorn Dam and the Hummingbird. Kidd Creek Hill joint project went well. We ended up having to extend the fence around the look out, but the sheep are going up over and under fine. Information signs were placed along the fence and threat of closure if that fence doesn't work to keep the OHVs off of the hill. Reports of no new tracks going up the hill, just where someone went around to the lookout site so it seems it was worthwhile. Nordegg Fish And Wildlife Officer reports more sheep up there than he's seen before.

FOESA

See attached FOESA Activity Update

Open Floor

- Would it be possible to get the PLUZ regulations and trail map be put onto iphone app? PIEOPS will check into that possibility

- Nordegg Chamber of Commerce is requesting membership in the Standing Committee. Terms of Reference will be reviewed as it may be a matter of the fixed commercial rep reporting to the Chamber.
- Grande Alberta North Trails map handed out for provincial data project. This map contains inventory of managed and maintained trails only. TPR is funding this map and working with Trailnet, snowmobile/OHV clubs and ESRD who is helping with inventory. A Grande Alberta South map is coming in the future. The launch of the Grande Alberta North map will hopefully take place this winter. It is not a navigational map, more accurate maps would be located at areas and hopefully helped being funded by the trails legislation.
- Of value to invite RCMP to meetings to hear enforcement concerns? Mountain Biking rep to speak with staff sergeant regarding Nordegg location and OHV enforcement.
- Mountain Biking group spent 12 days repairing bridges and deadfall. A Trans-Rockies event where one participant runs in to Lake of the Falls and another flies in and runs out has been scheduled. ESRD did get their permit request/issuance but would like more specific info, i.e. noise. Representative is to approach the organizer. Also the Tour of Alberta is about to happen. This is an international race occurring over stages during 7 days which will come through Rocky Mountain House or Sundre. Timeframe will probably be about the 3rd week of August.
- Hiking – the southeast side of Coliseum is now clear. Signage for the loop to Beaverdam is suggested.

Next Scheduled Meeting – January 31, 2013