

Bighorn Backcountry

Access Management Plan

Monitoring: Standing Committee

October 3, 2013 **FINAL COPY**

Rocky Mountain House Museum Boardroom

In Attendance

Don Livingston	Wayne Crocker	Fred Wilton	Dick Wymenga
Laura Raivio	Les Forsyth	Simon Dyer	Paul Radchenko
Case Korver	Gord Sanders	Rita Stagman	Dennis Schafer
Michael Doyle	James Brady	Lonnie Earl	Neil Godlonton
Dale Marshall	Kevin Dwyer	David Finn	Kevin Gagne

Chair

Don Livingston

Introduction

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

Activities, Enforcement, Signing

- Implementation of an interim plan for enforcement/education in the PLUZs resulted in hiring seasonal Parks service rangers. ESRD had two who reported to TPR in Rocky and were based out of Nordegg. For all intents and purposes they worked for ESRD covering the area from Brazeau Dam to Hummingbird. Prior to May long ESRD brought peace officers on for weekends who specifically did enforcement on public land. Local Fish & Wildlife enforcement officers were doing lands enforcement work along with their regular duties as well. Clearwater County peace officers were also given authority to enforce the Public Lands Act. This authority does not have a time limit and resulted in them having the ability to do enforcement within the course of their regular duties regarding loss and damage, vehicles in creeks, etc. The RCMP was also out on weekends and we had one guardian without enforcement powers to transport enforcement personnel to areas of concern. Laura and Peter were out doing signage.
- Information on the status of trails is still trickling into the office. The rainfall and flooding resulted in many landslides, washouts and a lot of displacement of fish.
- Publicly we are definitely seeing a change in behavior in the PLUZs for the better. For example, hunters leaving quads parked at the side of trails and hiking in, lots of regrowth on the previously closed trails. On September long at the Bighorn Dam there were about 600-700 machines but not many issues. Sheep and goats both appearing on Kidd Creek Hill. Noted people using the highlines at the places

provided. Overall it is pretty positive results. With perseverance can change some attitudes and behavior.

- Part 2 of the Bighorn Backcountry Vision Workshop will take place November 28, 2013.
- Brochure changes being done. Do we put temp closure changes on brochures or just website?
- Public land duties have a new boundary – we now have all the dispositions in Panther and Dormer/Sheep, so will be able to look after everything in the Bighorn Backcountry PLUZ system from Rocky. Klein Lake is not included in this boundary as it is located in the Ghost.

Question: We've been seeing lots of enforcement examples in the media, is there a ticketing option? We still have to write a long form ticket and go to court, no short form tickets yet. The short form specified penalty had been left out of PLAR and we are hoping that will be rectified soon to be able to streamline that process/choice of penalty.

Overview of August Field Day

Bighorn Backcountry representatives went out and looked at volunteer work and hiked in to view the prescribed burn site treatments at Hummingbird. It was a great opportunity to see a little bit more and receive an education regarding the prescribed burn. Brought up awareness and the takeaway was fantastic. Interest in coming out during the second stage has been expressed.

Prescribed Burn Update

Even with all the changes in government names, the prescribed burn plans remain the same. In this area we are not in a fire prone landscape even though we are fire dependant. We don't get a lot of opportunities to start prescribed burns.

At the Hummingbird, eight polygons make up the plans for this burn. For this prescribed burn a partnership has been done to perform trials which include five test plots about ½ mile each in size. Helitack crews went in to do cleanup and some tree removal to mimic FireSmart treatments and change the fuel structure and fire behavior. We know there will be fire at some point so we intend to burn a capping unit, and once done we can test these sites with full on crown fire to see if the sites withstand the impact (hopefully next spring). On location we will have cameras, burn monitors and sensors to collect the data. Currently there is not a great deal of data available.

The 2013 prescribed burn program had a fairly good start. F&ERD has entered into a partnership with the Wild Sheep Foundation. They received funds for habitat enhancement projects and have approached us to help with prescribed burn preparation. We have been on two flights now looking at burn sites as well as burn sites of the Foundation's own. They had assisted with the Ram Mountain prescribed burn adjacent to Ram lookout. At this site the reports are the sheep are loving the results.

One successful burn this season was the Upper Clearwater. There were three units to this burn and it was conducted with a helicopter borne helitorch. Minimal resources were required for the prescribed burn due to the site location and the timing. Burnt 290 ha of mixed severity burn and it occurred over a two day time period. The objective is to get 50-80% crown removal on the capping unit to give a good chance of stopping a wildfire. Trees in severe burn will regenerate in 10-15 years as this is a high altitude site but in meantime it creates more meadow and downed trees provide foraging.

Dave attended a Whitebark Pine workshop in Montana at the Alberta representative to discuss the role and importance of Whitebark Pine. We do have significant populations in the R11 unit and it has been placed on the endangered list. There are three enemies to this species – mountain pine beetle, fire exclusion and Whitebark Blister Rust. Our trees here tend to have more natural resistance to the blister rust as compared to the USA for some reason and research is to be done to find out why.

Question: Does the prescribed burn affect recreation access? It's a matter of presuppression on wood lots, bridges, etc. and lots of public notice to keep people out for the time period it takes to complete the burn. By removing veg does it increase erosion? We haven't seen that with the prescribed burn sites. As for blowdown it's worse on those stands that had root disease. The target of the burn is not to have that real deep burn causing the blowdown. People don't generally want trees burned but then they get used to the vistas and ask when it's going to happen again.

Question: At Nordegg the north cat guard is scheduled for rehabilitation this winter. Is there a standard for fire break size? No set standard, just what is needed at the time.

*planned prescribed burn map attached

OHV Access to Baldy Lookout Tower

Baldy lookout received 1000+ visitors every year and there have been increased occurrences of incidents of trespassing/vandalism while the lookout is open, OHV issues around the lookout site and people coming onto the lookout in the middle of the night. This results in safety issues for the lookout personnel as per CPTED. A fence was erected around the lookout itself but people still trying to get in. There are also RCMP and Telus towers at the site.

The proposal is to close access for OHV traffic from May-October with two options – 1. Close access at the existing gate at the bottom of the tower road or 2. Place a gate closer to tower with a staging area for OHVs and then people can walk in 5 mins to see the view. Having a gate that is opened every morning and closed every night is not feasible as the tower person can't and we would have to get someone from below to be responsible for it twice a day. Once a gate is built we would like to see informational signage and maybe an interpretive view with a bench or observation deck for the public away from the lookout tower. There are similar issues at other towers in our area, i.e. Baseline, Aurora and Limestone.

Committee response is that the option 2. would be the way to go as it looks like a good compromise, the walk is fairly flat and not far.

After this new upper gate is put in and if problems still continue along the current trend, ESRD will have to look into limiting access at the bottom gate instead.

*pictures attached

Camping Around Trout Ponds

We have received complaints regarding camping around the two fish ponds around Nordegg. Users are constantly leaving garbage everywhere. A request has come forth to make it as a day use area.

*no comments or concerns expressed by the committee against doing this

Timber Creek Bridge / Washouts

2013 has been a horrible year for flood damage to trails everywhere in the Bighorn Backcountry. Efforts of the volunteers have been tremendous in getting back to a point where they could be reopened! The Olds

Snowmobile Club and ESRD looked at the bridge over Timber Creek on the Clearwater Trail. It was put in a number of years ago but has now been washed out about 300 m downstream. This creek is an important bull trout spawning stream and doesn't freeze so we don't want any vehicles whatsoever in there. The trail washed out to the bridge point as well.

Olds Snowmobile Club – the bridge is intact but we would need a larger piece of equipment to move it (.ie. small backhoe or skid steer) and would have to cut trees to get down to it. We looked a possibility of putting it in a different location but we would have to build a new bridge if that was the case as this one is built for that smallest point on the creek. The old trail is overgrown and we could probably cut new trails around. We are willing to go put the bridge back in but need to know if the trail is feasible once we get past that point or if it is washed out as well.

Question: Is trail up Skeleton Creek to 40 Mile any good? There are washouts. Forbidden Creek trail is washed out as well.

Also Coral Creek, North Ram, Joyce Creek, Whitegoat, Pinto Lake trail including Entry Creek and Waterfalls Creek foot bridges, Landslide Lake and others are washed out.

Whitegoat Trail – you can get about 4km to the creek and then it becomes virtually impassable as the banks and trees are gone. A person would need at least 10ft of snow to use a sled in the winter.

Should we take these trails off the map or just list the closures on the website? Majority response requested website. Committee agreed to have closures for Whitegoat and Joyce Creek/North Ram put on the brochures.

Timber Creek - If it is fixable, can the club do it? Can we bring in equipment? There are mixed feelings on using equipment and approval would have to come through ESRD. We need to know what the trail farther back looks like first before that can be given. If the equipment is appropriate the use will be considered. ESRD is looking to get in with horses to look at this area around the end of October.

TPR is receiving dollars to do flood damage repair, perhaps ESRD can pursue that route as well. Infrastructure affected would need to be summarized.

We have to keep in mind that it might flood again next year and that we may have to look at other places to build so that the same trails are not repeatedly being washed out.

Clearwater County did major work on the roads and bridges and did it quickly.

Comment: The snowmobile trail at the Tay/Swan Lake area, like everywhere else, received extreme water damage and heavy usage. ESRD would like to come up with a plan and speak with the snowmobile club.

FOESA & BHAS

Friends of the Eastern Slopes – Performed a lot of before and after flood cleanup at the Eagle and Bighorn sites as well as regular seasonal maintenance and construction at all of the sites. Equipment was donated by multiple companies allowing for funds to be put on other projects.

*List of projects attached.

Question: Instead of TPR discussing closing provincial campgrounds can we look at opening them in different ways? I.e. horse access, OHV access. It's worth looking into. However OHV access is limited by current legislation.

Bighorn Heritage ATV Society – the main project was at Hummingbird. Canary Creek trail was the worst - spent 4 ½-5 days fixing and rerouting at Canary. Hummingbird trail was also a lot of work and there was a major trail change near falls. Costs for these two projects alone ran about \$18,630.00 (20 volunteers with a total of 640 hours @ \$15/hr = \$9600.00, 1 backhoe, 1 tractor with loader and quads = \$9030.00)

Open Floor

- Is there a new trapper cabin policy in place yet? Nothing yet, still going with the interim policy.
- Land Use Framework – the area being looked at recently is the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan which is being released October 10th. Other plans are underway and trails legislation has been bumped again to the spring legislature (DAO).
- Clearwater Rail Trail. Dollars are almost depleted from TPR for their part. The staging area almost done, signage and toilet are still to be completed. Going forth there is more work to do as areas closer to the gravel pit and Beaverdam PRA washed out. In total 13 km has been completed with the next focus looking at the portion to the east. Clearwater County is finding increased vandalism at historic site and is looking at signage and fencing along the trail.
- Suggestion for future signage is to see more severe sounding trail signage and repercussions.
- This will be Case Korver's last meeting as he is not running for re-election to the County this term.

Next Meeting Date – Thursday, February 6, 2014