

October 8, 2015 @ 9:00 FINAL COPY
Rocky Mountain House Provincial Building

Introduction

Round table conducted. Brad Jones is replacing Michel Woodman for Calgary land use for the time being.

Information on the Castle Region – ADM of Parks

What is happening in the Castle and how does that affect Bighorn Backcountry PLUZs? Castle public consultation is now finished. The area was formerly called the Castle Special Management Area. The piece being considered now is different than what was initially in the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan. What is different now moving forward, is that the entire area is proposed to be designated under the Parks Act as wildland park along with a PLUZ area that will allow logging and industrial mineral areas. The area that was formerly the PLUZ is now proposed to be a provincial park, no commercial logging will be permitted and no crown mineral rights. Those are the two big changes of what wouldn't be permitted.

There are a number of activities not normal to a provincial park that will be permitted in the Castle. Two primary uses are the continuation of hunting and the use of OHVs on designated trails. Those activities are not usually permitted in a provincial park. There is recognition and a commitment to those types of uses that were originally on the landscape. The intent of the protection is to maintain the biodiversity of the area.

There has been much consultation, close to 3000 people provided feedback online. We had comments that cover the entire spectrum from all across the province. In addition there were a number of individual meetings. After Nov 9th we will be providing the minister with our thoughts and suggestions. It will definitely open the conversation on how we will manage parks across the province.

Q – I don't see trapping addressed?

A - Trapping would continue in the Castle as it is today.

Q - What about access? Here we give an authorization to use OHVs outside the designated times.

A - Those would be issued in the Castle as well.

Q – Logging has taken place for the last 100 years and creates that biodiversity we are looking for. It's odd we are kicking that out.

A - There may still be some logging activities to maintain forest health.

Q – Does this represent Parks getting serious about getting in to the OHV game? What's the rationale for two designations?

A - Yes and no, OHVs haven't been as front and centre before but we have dealt with it in the past, i.e. McLean Creek. It is a legitimate activity on public land and there is recognition now that there are some legitimate places where this can be managed and allowed. There is a broader recognition now and this opens that door for us to properly manage the activity. As for two designations – there may be some opportunity to look at the boundaries but the main reason is that the intent of a wildland park is to provide a significant wilderness experience with limited facilities. Typically wildland parks do not have highway access, however that exists in a provincial park. The provincial park designation allows for areas with better access and more facilities. We don't want to lose that separate classification here and then lose it everywhere. Within a wildland park we cannot issue new dispositions, we honor old ones but no future development.

Q - In the Castle documentation there are designated un-serviced camping areas. When it is all said and done is there going to be a plan to manage un-serviced camping areas? What happens in the time frame before the plans get done and in effect?

A - Suggestions on the consultation page gave some ideas on what that would look like. In the interim the idea is that there will be a transition period so that we are not just stopping an opportunity without providing an alternative. The Castle will be a good opportunity so see how this will work.

Q – Are we looking at province wide parks?

A - What we are still thinking of doing is finishing the planning processes for the province so we are in a bit of a hiatus. Cannot foresee what will happen in the other regional planning processes.

Comment - It's hard to put in the volunteer time and effort when it seems like it's just going to be taken and made into a park.

Q – Is Parks' thinking currently a result of the consultation process? Is a result of consultation now based on the recommendations?

A - The Castle now is part of the current government's platform promise. This is something the GOA has asked Parks to do, not Parks asking to do it. The minister has been clear that it is enhanced protection of the area for recreation and tourism outcomes not commercial outcomes.

Comment – this committee has been around for a long time, full of volunteers. This should be taken more into account than the people's opinions that have never even been out to the area.

Q – Currently we cannot perform prescribed burns in the existing wilderness areas here. How are you planning to manage fire in the Castle?

A - We are open to fire as a management tool. The wilderness areas are problematic currently and we need to have that conversation. Prescribed burning does take place in Kananaskis, for example, and this could be something similar.

Activity/Enforcement Update

It was an interesting summer, park rangers and COs had a very big impact on this area. Over 1000 tickets were issued by Parks in this area and we had a strong working relationship with RCMP and County as well. Public feedback has been very positive. CO/Ranger enforcement actions issued were: Traffic Safety (640), OHV (102), Gaming/Liquor (95), Parks (67), Fisheries (50), Public Lands (38), Trespass (11), Other (27)

For PLAR infractions they still cannot write a violation ticket, it remains a mandatory court date so it's difficult to have this happen with seasonals that won't be available for court. There were a lot of written warnings.

The level of compliance is really up at the Hummingbird, not as much at the Bighorn Dam.

Signage Update

We had two seasonal workers and they covered a lot of ground and put up a lot of signage. Looking at getting Avenza in place and QR codes at the kiosks.

Trails – Proposals/Concerns/Completions

Monument – looked at the proposal for a new summer motorized trail up the valley. Discussed with steering and are recommending that it not be opened at this time. There are three concerns; one is it is an environmentally sensitive valley. It is located in the high alpine so the trail from 2002 is still showing even though it's had no traffic. The second is there are lots of signs of grizzlies in the valley as well. The third is that we are still waiting on the outcome of the NSRP to determine who is going to be in charge of the land base.

There is one trail up to a lookout from the historical marker that is going to be given the 'okay' for OHV access and to put a bench for a lunch spot.

Tershishner – T1 to T2 on the east is felt that it is not worth putting the time and money into it as there is no place to bypass the current wet area problems. The investment so far has went into the west side. The concern is that it is an area that doesn't have a whole lot of trails anyway, do we want to take one out? We need to maintain in our mind that we could put something in place of this trail. Firesmart is looking to get into that area and there may be some trail possibilities there. Current decision is to temporarily close this portion of the trail until further notice.

North Ram – D17 trail to the SW has some beaver dams creating problems that would be more work to bypass that we are necessarily willing to do. The trail is a good except for the dams, culvert washed out, and a few unsustainable river crossings. They may have funding to fix this so it needs discussion. We are going to be moving the D14 to the no motorized sign. These trails in this area will remain temporarily closed to OHVs until further assessment and repairs can be completed.

Joyce Creek – will be open for winter, no work going to happen on this trail.

James Lake – From Eagle Lake west to the trunk road has serious issues all the way along. Around Eagle the trail is actually in the lake and there's huge erosion between Eagle and James Lake. Flood recovery won't tackle that area and FOESA doesn't have time right now. It is hard to reroute as it's surrounded by steep mountain. Winter use? This trail will be closed to OHVs year round. This will be open to snowmobiles in the winter but will need to have enough snow.

People go ice fishing into Eagle Lake but with the lack of snow in the area do we need to leave it closed to OHV all winter? Concern about excessive rutting but opinion is we could fix trail to sustain. This will be brought forward at the next steering committee meeting in Feb.

Panther – Lisa was out from the gap on Panther to Banff on the Panther. With the wagon reroute it will keep river crossings to a minimum. The 22% incline on Grocery Hill will be avoided now. Crews made a berm and widened parts on the trail, installed temporary bridges and adjusted slopes. There were some complaints regarding the switchbacks with a 4 horse team so they are looking at widening while in there already. Next summer will proceed with work on the saddle trail and blocking the old trail.

Q - How many 4 horse teams compared to 2? Fairly rare until you get into later fall activity with slippery slopes and more equipment. Can see far enough ahead for meeting another wagon.

Expectations of the Standing Committee

The members of the steering committee give honest answers but we need advocates in Edmonton as well to promote what we are doing as volunteers and support the work being done.

Comments: With the new organization, regionally this work and planning falls under Resource Management. There is some planning and a funding model being developed for a full recreation management program. This is a high departmental priority and should allow for movement forward on a provincial program. The Steering Committee hasn't had as much representation from the different departments and we don't really have an Edmonton rep right now. The atmosphere has changed and the attitude is changing slowly but surely.

On funding the AOHVA would like to see an enhancement fee through a DAO and they have done a latest edition of the proposal. The feeling is this would solve many funding problems.

Comments: DAO's have been used for some Resource Management programs in the past but currently the government is reviewing the use and functionality of DAO's.. The South Saskatchewan Region is developing a recreation management plan for Porcupine Hills this year and this may provide a standard for recreation management plans.

The Bighorn Backcountry group works because of governance and people working hard for the success of the plan. There could be problems in other parts of the province but here there is a level of trust.

Backcountry Trail Rehabilitation Update

Timber Creek bridge – issues with it being a Class A stream. The challenge was to install a 50ft bridge across the stream without touching the water. Had an excavator go in on rig mats and then sling the stringers across and placed a rig mat to get the heavy equip across. Also fixed the trail from Dewey's camp to Timber Creek to make wagon accessible. Removed duff, widened and created drainage ditches including deep ditching and cross ditches. Volunteers are doing trail work from Timber to Sawmill. In total this work brings the trail down from 12 river crossings to 2.

Q – Are there plans for the old wagon trail? Told there is a nice campsite so need to discuss.

A - There are no plans for it at this time.

Panther – rerouted the trail up onto the ridge and followed it for 5km and then down onto a plain. It now crosses the river approx. 3 times instead of travelling down it.

Pinto lake trail bridges were installed. Lake of Falls is earmarked for next season. Did some work in the Dam and work at Chungo and Sunkay. Around the lake at Sunkay crews fixed the trail up with some reroute and there is still some work to do in that area. Completed a small reroute on the Rail Trail. The Glacier Trail had bridges replaced. There is still lots of work in the Hummingbird to be done, currently working on crossings and the fibreglass bridge installation.

Prescribed Burn Update

In plans for this year included Blackstone, Chungo/Wapiabi, Hummingbird and the Upper Clearwater capping units. The season started out promising and we had hoped to get a good chunk done this spring. In actuality there were enough showers that we didn't get big enough windows; then the fire situation up north got bad.

On April 14 we did a test burn at Hummingbird but it didn't go well. On April 28 we burned Unit 1 and regeneration will be quick there. The outfitter there usually starts June 1st making the window very short.

South Idlewild – did a habitat burn for elk with ACA. Last one was done in 2010 so we went back this year for a meadow burn, which was completed mostly by hand. Burned about 70 ha.

Upper Clearwater/40 Mile – this year the unit along Forbidden Creek and behind the cabin were left to do and we managed to burn the Forbidden Creek unit. The project got shut down because of the situation up north but will remain on the books for a while longer.

Monitoring – used cameras again this year on 40 Mile, Hummingbird and the Upper Clearwater. Can set up for one pic per day or every hour for example. Used to monitor completed burns, snow conditions, etc.

Upcoming Plans – we will still have the unfinished projects. New is the Bighorn Creek, partly on the YaHa Tinda with Parks Canada and it is mostly grasslands but also some old growth. Plans are to target the Buck-4-Wildlife blocks and areas that historically have burned. It will be a large unit, about 8000 ha. Also planned is in the Upper Clearwater valley with Parks Canada. As well at Whiterabbit Creek, which is an old proposal that never got approved. Looking at revising and expanding that area to re-submit. It contains a lot of old forest and is not highly used. This may be something that can be done in the fall.

Asked for feedback on the Upper CW Valley/Parks prescribed burn plans: No comments

Pine beetle is still an objective with these burns. Looking again at the Spreading Creek fire to see if the burn we have already is enough to stop a swarm from the north. This is a long term preventative strategy to get younger growth forest on the landscape. Looking and re-burning again into the Upper Saskatchewan.

FOESA Update

Good year with the sale of 700 family memberships. Held 3 fundraisers. Installed 15 new highlines at Hummingbird and 10 new at YaHa Tinda. Created a new loop at 7 Mile at the end of the campground. Currently bring in gravel at Cutoff. The donation box at the Hummingbird paid off this year. The staging area at Hummingbird was filled to capacity most of summer. Eagle Creek and Bighorn Creek was full for 3 months. Planned expansion on the Bighorn Creek did not happen.

Concerns – Boy Scout group was staying at Hummingbird, can they be moved? They blocked the camping area off with vehicles, washrooms were messed up, Scout leaders not having receptive attitude. GOA will address this issue when the Scouts get their TFA next year.

When FOESA is done with the Shell gravel pile at Peppers Lake do they have to complete anything? It should be up to Shell to reclaim. GOA will do a status check on this pit.

Comments: The FOESA website is shut down for now. Klein Lake – rocks blocking access. Sundre, Calgary and FOESA rep to discuss. Klein lake trail is in the Ghost PLUZ so we cannot decide here.

Update on NSRP

Still in a holding pattern until the release of the RAC

Open floor

- With more recreation management more people are coming out and utilizing facilities and areas.
- Need a closer manure dumping site so people use it out at Hummingbird. GOA and FOESA to go out and pick a new site.

Next Standing – Thursday, February 11, 2016