

**BIGHORN BACKCOUNTRY
STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING**



OCTOBER 12, 2023

9:00AM – 12:00PM

In Person Meeting

MEETING SUMMARY

Brad Jones	Blake Christianson	Julia Wachowski	Bryan Cermak
Dom Kmet	Adena Earl	Mark Handel	Jim Turner
Alan Ernst	Garett Schmidt	Dennis Schafer	Doug King
Troy Dezall	Michael Doyle	Curtis Nichol	Phil Hofer
Loyal Ma	Larry Schmidek	Dale Marshall	Suzanne Comfort
Vinton Lovell	Chiarastella Feder	Lorne Hindbo	Andrew Pillman
Adrian Clark	Dustin Bisson	Laura Raivio	

Item #	TOPIC
1.	<p><u>Introduction</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Michael Doyle is re-joining as the Winter Motorized rep. Kris Heemeryck replace by Mark Handel on steering committee. - Changed the usual agenda by sending program updates out in advance. New agenda will be driven by stakeholders, referrals and problems we want your opinion on.
2.	<p><u>Forestry Trunk Road/OHV Pilot</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Andrew Pillman from Alberta Transportation spoke to the possible expansion to allow OHVs use on highway 734 from Nordegg south to the Red Deer River. Requested input from committee on how to make this safe, maintain integrity and move into implementation. <p><u>Committee Suggestions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make requirements same as a street legal motorcycle. - Concern that side x sides do not have signal lights, use hand signals. - OHVs permitted during daylight hours only, speed limit, driver's license required. AOHVA glad to input more. - More enforcement and better signage. - Interconnecting trails would be helpful. Lower speed limit for regular vehicles, log haulers, commercial. Add viewpoints to pull off at. - Current pilot confusing as to where OHVs allowed and not allowed, signs in wrong place. - Need tools for enforcement to explain why allowed on highway 734 but not on other highways. More boots on the ground. - Sensitivity for wildlife in some of those areas. - 734 is a provincial highway. Usually 3-numbered highways are Clearwater County instead of provincial. - Possible to post haul days? Expectation would have to be for people to check a website before travelling. No cell coverage many places. - Create pullouts and safety spots.

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Q&A / Comments

- Aside from the Trunk Road discussion, pointed out that the layout of the staging at Hoodoo is a disaster waiting to happen. Parking and hiking across is in a curve and on a hill. Vehicles cannot see the crosswalk. Need advance warning signs. Only signage now is right at the crosswalk that you cannot see until right there. I and the other crossings have no signage except right at all the crosswalks. Crosswalk is not even a hatched line.
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3. Forestry and Parks Program Updates

- Information was sent out in advance. Discussing top 3 from Lands, Parks and Enforcement submissions

Lands

- Upgrading rustic camping, loop roads and adding more toilets at the Bighorn Dam.
- Completing a connector trail over to Tershishner to get riders out of the ditch along highway 11.
- Tershishner north of highway almost completed all the way to the lookout and down to the river.
- Rail Trail completed from Saunders to east of Misty Valley. One bridge left to complete at Sunset Creek. Wayfinding and some interpretive signage installed.
- Approximately 13 km mostly roughed in at Black Mountain by Snow Creek. Looking at 2 more years and 40 km total of trail.
- Nordegg Trail Planning sub-committee – 4 meetings to date, last one took place on October 4. A map has been identified, hoping for a draft plan before Christmas. Will be looking for standing committee feedback.

Q&A / Comments

- Concern raised that Nordegg trail planning has grown bigger than what we initially started to do to integrate trails around Nordegg. How to maintain these trails in the future? That is the reason we are looking for groups to maintain and handle these trails.
- Will funds be allotted to trail heads and camping areas east of Nordegg? Connector off of the Swale Road to Harlech, developing parking with viewing areas at Taunton, Chambers Creek and Saunders.
- Black Mountain work is through a FRIAA grant, not a government funded project.
- Preacher's south has new road, upgrading camping? Plan is to leaving camping rustic as is.
- Kudos to enforcement for their efforts at education in the highway 11 corridor. Major struggle this year regarding garbage.
- Public Lands Camping Pass (PLCP) intent is to funnel the funds back into infrastructure. There is no infrastructure in Wilderness Areas.
- We preach know before you go, pack out what you pack in, isn't providing garbage cans defeating that? FOESA does not provide garbage cans, expense to have them is too high.

Enforcement

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - June/July bear encounters almost catastrophic. Waste management issues, especially at Preacher’s Point. Bear lockers had been installed but people were filling them with garbage instead. - PLCP checks gave opportunity to assess camps, provide education and have those interactions but it takes a huge amount of time. - Liabilities around garbage and food storage are very real and more education is needed. - New users learn about these areas but do not know how to properly use the area. - Concerted effort to get out to the backcountry and Wilderness Areas made. - Recommend more efforts in getting information out to the public on social media. <p><u>Q&A / Comments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When PLCP launched, part of those funds were supposed to go to additional enforcement. Locally we haven’t gained and are actually losing an officer. That position is being recruited to and may be getting one more. Officers covering the Panther area are now living out of Sundre. Recruitment is showing to be an issue.
4.	<p><u>Maps</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New provincially designated trail maps are being created for public land trails. - The Trails Act created a new framework but will need years to implement policy and operating procedures all pointing towards provincial trails. - First ministerial orders created 7000 km of provincial trails across the province. - Alberta Snowmobile Association (ASA) and Alberta Off Highway Vehicle Association (AOHVA) are first trail managers under Trails Act and managing a significant amount of the trails with member clubs. - Developing maps that directs to partners other area-focussed maps for more information. - First step is trail data clean-up. Should have something for viewing at winter meeting. - There will be changes to the look and feel of the Bighorn map. Minor trails are not provincial trails but will leave them on and label as unmaintained. - Plan is to get these maps complete, approved and have for print and website for May 1. - Cleaning up the Bighorn PLUZ website from top down. <p><u>Q&A / Comments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue having geo-referenced maps for use through Avenza? Yes. - Coincide with IHunter? No, it is a third-party provider. - Why can’t work be done on some of these temporary closed trails if we have funding and people to do the work? We work with AOHVA and Bighorn Heritage ATV Society (BHAS) to assess and use funding. Some of those trails cross a creek multiple times or go straight up the creek and cannot be used.
5.	<p><u>Area Structure Plans Update</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation by Adrian Clarke/Dustin Bisson – Clearwater County - Background – 1992 the province approved the David Thompson Corridor resource plan. One direction was to identify 5 development nodes to accommodate recreation and tourism. Shunda/Goldeye, Saunders/Alexo, Nordegg (no longer considered a node), Bighorn Canyon, David Thompson/Whitegoat Lake. Clearwater County has prioritized the preparation of area structure plans for the Shunda-Goldeye, Saunders-Alexo and Whitegoat Lakes Nodes

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- While preliminary concept maps were prepared in past before development in a node is considered, proposed applications would be adopted at the time.
- In considering node development studied bio-physical maps, air maps, etc and some areas not developable re: wetness, slope, road access. Other areas had moderate to good development potential.
- Best to go on ground at least 80% of each node was covered. We went out from Sept 2022 to August 2023 to identify potential areas of suitability. The study had stated some areas were conducive for development and we found that was not necessarily so.
- Development = construction of any future use within the node. Business, campground, around tourism and recreational development.
- Each node has areas and capacity to accommodate a variety of development. Shunda/Goldeye has least potential capacity. Whitegoat and Saunders have considerable potential. Biggest surprise was Whitegoat Lakes as it has the most potential but comes with more challenges. All nodes had challenges such as natural and historical features, aim to allow all proposed developments to occupy 20% of the node, our objective is to conserve the node. The 20% includes land use and proposed and existing trails.
- Draft of first area structure plan concept will go to the province for review. Public hearing should be in the spring. This is not statutory, is concept only.
- Only uses that confirm to the spirit of the plan would be approved by the County.
- Recognized David Thompson Corridor has potential for tourism and nodes that would allow for a tourism route for the west country. Looked on a regional level at a figure 8 loop highways 11, 93, 22, 16 and 1 travel route.
- Node plans to complement existing facilities along the highway. Also complement future uses, OHV, mountain biking and hiking.
- Challenges that would limit development: Saunders/Alexo - challenges with utilities, access, terrain and historical significance. Not a lot of access routes into the node from the highway. Shunda/Goldeye – every area has something already within the areas identified. Wanting to keep development within that 20%, we do not want to affect the balance of environmental sensitivities. Whitegoat – major factors are utilities, water, sewage, cell service, indigenous land, terrain. Along the lake behind the resort there is a setback line that TransAlta has registered that development cannot be within about a 250 m set back. Have limited impact and considered wildlife corridors in each node. Will be brought to a biologist beforehand. Developers would have to follow BearSmart principles.
- Plans will support current process of future development. Last step for applicants would be to talk to Clearwater County, then the province to get a disposition, then back to County to review application. Clearwater County would then approve if meets County and Provincial policy.
- Anticipate completion of draft no later than November and clarification of timing with public consultation and special interest groups. Based on that timing will finalize when completion of the plan will be.

Q&A / Comments

- Goldeye area and connectivity to Nordegg, need to put some funding into Nordegg.
- Most of the nodes are in Zone 1 prime protection area. Along highway 11 most are in the Kiska/Willson PLUZ. Need to consult our groups and mitigate the impact.

**BIGHORN BACKCOUNTRY
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-------------------------	-------------------------	--------------------------

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - These nodes are already there, and Clearwater County is trying to protect the ecological value of the area. Finding a way to ensure we get development and protect the area at the same time. - How does this work with the Nordegg sub-committee? They would be a stakeholder to be consulted with on the plan. If they provide us with possible routes those would be added in as part of the concept.
6.	<p><u>AOHVA Trail Manager</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alberta Off Highway Vehicle Association (AOHVA) was founded in 1969 in Edmonton from a need to create a provincial organization representing OHVs in Alberta. We have 24 member clubs and affiliate members. - The Trails Act was supported and pushed with AOHVA as a trail manager. Work through the clubs is 100% volunteer. Where we don't have clubs, we are direct contracting. - With the Trails Act funding from registration can come back and fund the clubs. We want to preserve trails for future generations. - Prior to this there was no funding mechanism, now have a model to cover expenses. With many kilometres to take care of, we now have a way to take care of them. - Need to educate our users on backcountry etiquette. - Developing best practices and working through the new way of doing things. - People don't have to be a member of a club, the whole mantra is we want responsible, respectable riding. We help try to deliver those education programs, safety programs. - Mean age group is 25-44 years old. Older users are largely riding as a means to get out into nature.
7.	<p><u>Open Floor</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ya Ha Tinda – lots of work completed on the Bighorn Creek Campground. Areas reclaimed and seeded with a wire fence around. Added new sites. Completed cattle guard and burn area. Bear attack just west of the ranch, if concerned contact Banff National Park (BNP). Concern brought up around bison fences impacting grizzlies. Seem to be congested. Feel the fences effect sheep movement and push them right through the area of the grizzlies. Fence is for secondary containment of bison. Concerned party to meet with BNP. - Request to repair Scalp Creek trail around Ya Ha Tinda Ranch. An email response from recreation management regarding not allowing trail repairs on Scalp Creek was read out. In the past the large elk herd was the primary reason for no access. Little snow conditions around the Ranch and OHV damage were the reasons for not going ahead. Large amount of equestrian use trail damage as well. Response - Recreation have been gathering information and will not be looking at repairing the trail. Snow conditions are not favorable most of the time. - Meeting with David Thompson Snowriders. Do we want to put in a bunch of money for little opportunity? Large cost for historical resources, is it worth it? Do you spend a lot of money on one trail or spend the money on a lot of trails? Would like to discuss at that meeting. - Some trails are marked as temporarily closed. Legend states "Trails that have been temporarily closed to motorized usage due to severe erosion or washout. These will remain closed until maintenance can be performed or new routes created." How do we reopen a designated trail, what is the process? Either change the designation so it is not temporary or develop the process to be able to maintain the trail. - FOESA – South Ram and 40 Mile cabins were fixed up with 2 licensed carpenters. Do

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-------------------------	-------------------------	--------------------------

not want control of the cabins, just looking to have them left open for in case of emergency. Removed lots of trees in the new campgrounds to make them usable. Installed 2 toilets at Eagle and 2 at Hummingbird. Constructing a loop around for camping behind the burn at Hummingbird. Started on new toilets at 7 Mile, Elk Creek and Peppers Lake. Peppers overflow camping completed. Received funding to work on the 9 new campgrounds. Bighorn Creek went ahead with the work from Ya Ha Tinda. 3000 memberships sold. Camp hosts are working well.

8. Next Bighorn Backcountry Standing Committee Meeting – February 1, 2024

Action Items	Description	Assigned To:	Due Date
1.	Copy of OHV/road policy for Clearwater County to Andrew Pillman	Brian Cermak	Fall 2023
2.	Discuss Scalp Creek and Eagle/James trails at David Thompson Snowriders meeting. How to reopen a trail.	Brad Jones	Fall 2023