

**BIGHORN BACKCOUNTRY  
STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING**



**FEBRUARY 2, 2023**

**9:00AM – 12:00PM**

**In Person Meeting**

## MEETING SUMMARY

Don Livingston	Michael Doyle	Julia Wachowski	Tyler Ritchie
Dale Marshall	Suzanne Comfort	Larry Schmidek	Philip Lacerte
Jeremy Cooper	Alex Miller-Tait	Jamie Bruha	Stephen Shenfield
Curtis Nichol	Lorne Hindbo	Jim Turner	Neil Ratcliffe
Dominik Kmet	Travis Earl	Adena Earl	Simon Dyer
Garett Schmidt	Dennis Schafer	Troy Dezall	Brad Jones
Blake Christianson	Grant Santo	Laura Raivio	

Item #	TOPIC
1.	<p><u>Introduction</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Don Livingston’s last meeting, new co-chairs are Blake Christianson and Brad Jones.</li> <li>- Mike Doyle stepping down, replacement for Winter Motorized alternate is Troy Dezall</li> <li>- Peter Davies stepping down, replacement for Summer Motorized alternate is Garett Schmidt</li> <li>- Alex Miller-Tait introduction as new Director of Recreation, Ecosystem and Land Management, replacing Don.</li> </ul>
2.	<p><u>Enforcement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enforcement stats from October 2022 – January 2023 (Conservation Officers (CO) only) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o 51 total enforcement actions written by COs (primarily Public Lands Regulations, Parks Regulations and Traffic Safety issues). Majority of those files are non-Public Land Use Zone (PLUZ).</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Officers continue to focus patrol efforts primarily in the Kiska/Willson PLUZ, due to the moderately high recreational use along the Corridor and Abraham Lake.</li> <li>- Ongoing complaints of unlawful OHV use on the Panther Road and around the Mountain-Aire Lodge. COs working with affected stakeholders to address the concerns.</li> <li>- Officers working with Ministry partners in Lands and Parks, as well as Fish and Wildlife Branch, to identify concerns and opportunities for information sharing and collaboration.</li> <li>- Staffing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Rocky Mountain House (RMH) District is fully staffed at 4 COs since the last meeting in October. Rocky down a CO position, which was transferred to Red Deer this past fall.</li> <li>o Cochrane District fully staffed at 4 COs, in addition to one CO seconded to a temporary Training Coordination role.</li> <li>o Two districts are working collaboratively for the portions of the Bighorn Backcountry that are in the fringes of both districts- Panthers Corner PLUZ and southern portion of Upper Clearwater/Ram PLUZ.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- General observations:</li> </ul>

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- Overall, officers are observing lower levels of use across all land bases than the past 2 winters.
- 310-LAND complaint line continues to be well utilized.
- Low number of overnight use, but Public Land Camping Pass compliance throughout the winter months seems to be comparable to the summer.
- Increasing number of unlawful access into closed roads (PLUZ and non-PLUZ). Public accessing closed roads for hunting and camping. Google Maps directing some users to those roads.

3.

Activities

- Highway (hwy) 11 safety upgrades: Rustic camping upgrades 80% complete, to be finished with gravel this summer. Signage and site furnishings in summer. No dirt work at Coliseum yet.
- Aiming for directional signage (blue signs on the hwy) installation in the spring for staging and camping areas.
- Black Mountain wildfire reclamation complete, kept some cat guard open to utilize as trails.
- Connecting Rail Trail to FireSmart trail system from industrial area. Completed 2.5 km with about 500 m left to go.
- Track setting trails by Goldeye and Fish Lake. Cross country ski trails mulched last year, tracked this year. Nordegg Community Association track setting Shunda Meadows and the golf course.
- Plans for Bighorn Dam upgrades to camping below the dam to start, upper section will come second. Building a connector trail from Tershishner access back to the dam to get people out of the ditch.
- Tershishner trails T1-T3 can now be opened. All planning underway, funding dependent. T3-T6 to be finished and up to lookout.
- More mulching around Goldeye Lake area to expanding cross country skiing.

Outside PLUZs

- Harlech staging has been built as a staging area to the Rail Trail off of the Swale Road. Park and access through Provincial Recreation Area (PRA) under bridge to the Rail Trail. Misty Valley reroute logging and dirt complete, debris disposed. Gravel and bridges in summer and another 7.5 km of trail to go this summer.
- Harlech staging also connects to the Shunda Base road, will create a loop up to Shunda Viewpoint and back to Saunders.
- Sunset Creek to Chambers Creek is next and will be starting the approval process. Last will be a parking by the Taunton bridge to allow hwy traffic and people with mobility issues to be able to park and have access.

Crescent Falls Upgrade

- Crescent Falls PRA will be closed June 1, 2023 (updated post-meeting) to May 1, 2024 to upgrade the Crescent Falls parking lot, trails, access road to falls viewpoints and campground.

Q&A/Comments

- Will outfitter access be informed about Crescent?
- We cannot allow any access during construction. If good window in the fall they will

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be working right through. Does that mean packing in from the highway? No alternate access designated. Another option would be through Tershishner and cross the Bighorn River for horse access.

**4. Nordegg Area Trail Plan Update**

The Bighorn Backcountry Sub-committee is established and the first meeting took place December 12, 2022.

- Received input on what is working well and what is not out on the trails currently, and what are opportunities that the trail plan can capitalize on.
- Had good representation at the meeting from the diversity of recreation uses in the area.
- Several First Nations and Metis communities are interested in participated in the sub-committee.

Bighorn sub-committee meeting #2 will be Feb 13, 2023

- Diving into the details of trail networks: discuss trail alignments, activities and restrictions if needed (e.g., seasonality of use, activity types)
- Review trails within the context of environmental, cultural and multi-use considerations.
- Maps on hand for various information layers: Historic Resource Values, Wildlife Sensitivity, Water, Recreation Opportunities Mapping, (select) Dispositions.
- Depending how much we get through with the sub-committee in Meeting #2, we will likely have 2 or 3 more meetings on specific trails.

Recreation Use and Experience survey

- Currently analyzing data from the Summer-Fall survey
- Intent to inform Nordegg Area trails planning, but will have value for the Bighorn so we can share those results with the Standing committee.
- Currently doing winter surveys

**5. Abraham Lake Access for OHV/Snow Vehicles**

- Public asking how to access and where. No designation area to lawfully access. Currently directing to the Cline landing across from Pinto staging, unloading at Pinto staging. Recognize that it is not legally permitted. One call wanting to access from Tershishner by staging on either side of hwy, cross hwy and go down to lake. Trail not maintained and actual access is not safe. Safest is Cline/Pinto. Other option is at Abraham Slabs. Can essentially drop machine at high water mark and then it would be legal. Would like to make Pinto OHV accessible as it is the safest area. Has been made bigger and gets plowed out.
- Request came in to extend timing for vehicle access at Abraham Lake to April 30 from April 1. No objections.
- We will also be identifying 3 sites to launch a boat in the summer, indicated through signage.

**6. Winter Trails**

- Currently OHVs to Feb 1. This year more snow so had some issues with side x sides (SxS) going up Ranger Creek. Was evaluated and with the snow we had it has been filled in. Summer motorized alt. looking at interactive map showing what has been groomed, showing where good for OHV and where it is snow vehicle only recommended from a certain point.

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

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Proposing a random sledding corridor on the Onion Lake trail along the meadow. OHVs still restricted to trail. No objections</li> <li>- Proposing to reopen long-time temporarily closed Tershishner Trails T1-T2-T3 as winter only (magenta color on map). No objections. T1-T3 has had work completed and will be reopened this summer as well.</li> <li>- Scalp Creek Trail – Winter Motorized reviewed. The piece around the Ya Ha Tinda Ranch and a boulder bypass needs to be fixed. Map provided. Looking for snowmobile only. After trail being closed for so long may have to consult with wildlife biologist again. Will take into consideration.</li> </ul> <p><u>Q&amp;A/Comments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does Trails Act funding come through an association or is funding available outside that?</li> <li>- Trails Act does not provide funding, rather the Department is looking at grants to provincial association (e.g. Alberta Off Highway Vehicle Association and the Alberta Snowmobile Association for motorized). Some granting opportunities may be available through the capital program as well. Coordination between groups and Blake Christianson’s team. Have not had a sustainable money resource prior to this. Going to take a long time to work through the backlog of issues. Prioritizing the areas and then going ahead with work from there.</li> </ul>
7.	<p><u>Alberta Hiking Association (AHA) Trail Counter Pilot</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Starting with the safety upgraded trailheads, AHA will be inventorying the trails, putting out more trail counters, reporting conditions of facilities, up-top conditions, opportunities to improve (e.g. slingable outhouses, tent pads).</li> <li>- Led by AHA board, wanting to get a volunteer on the ground. Hopefully this will provide more data to support trail upgrades.</li> <li>- Used to have the Adopt-A-Trail program. Then had to put everything on Bighorn Heritage ATV Society (BHAS). Looking to extend that steward program to all users and may lead to major upgrades, bridges, etc. Wanting to extend that program onto public land.</li> </ul>
8.	<p><u>Friends of the Eastern Slopes (FOESA) Update</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Since last meeting completed tree removal at Panther Public Land Recreation Area (PLRA) with gravelling left to do. Have a trail network from Panther PLRA now. All FOESA campgrounds except Bighorn Creek will allow OHVs this year but to be confirmed by Department</li> <li>- Outhouses ready to go in at Hummingbird.</li> <li>- Equestrian Panels – FOESA voted no panels anywhere in the campsites. GOA looking at allowing around highlines, would that be an impact? Not really the impact that is the problem, it is that many people do not attach the panels properly and then a horse is running through the campground tangled up with a panel(s) creating a danger to itself and other campers/horses. Need to align with legislation.</li> <li>- Bighorn Creek Campground – permits in place surrounding the flood mitigation work. Banff National Park (BNP) has marked the path. Cut trees and are burning debris, storing some for firewood.</li> <li>- New FOESA-run campgrounds at the Red Deer River, Wild Horse Creek, Cartier Creek, Deer Creek and James/Wilson. No exact start dates.</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All FOESA-run campgrounds are first come first serve. All are open now but Bighorn Creek.</li> </ul> <p><u>Q&amp;A/Comments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Was there any look at a wagon trail on Scalp? It was checked out and was deemed too steep for wagons.</li> <li>- Alberta Parks is evaluating all the Provincial Recreation Area (PRA) campsites and their need for upgrades. Want to take a closer look to meet the demands that are desired. Demand is for amenities for many Parks sites.</li> <li>- Forestry has used fire crews to identify hazard trees and falling in the past and may be able to help in that way again.</li> <li>- Agreement with oil company to plow roads into Peppers and the pit above Hummingbird.</li> </ul>
9.	<p><u>Terms of Reference (TOR) Review</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Generally the way members are picked is to go through the clubs to find someone who represents that sector of user. If a member of the public wants an item of concern brought up, they bring it to the representative, who then brings it to the committee.</li> <li>-</li> </ul>
10.	<p><u>Open Floor</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- BNP bison fencing. Fence at the Panther, straight across the river – feels it is in the wrong place and not allowing other wildlife to bypass properly. Does not know how the other fences are working at the Clearwater and James.</li> <li>- BNP did come to the Lands Division and we issued them the authority to install the fence. They will be evaluating the year report to see if we are wanting them to stay on land outside BNP. The fence was built, but there will be consultation before any consideration for permanency. At 40 Mile we have not had reports of issues. There is a cattle guard being put in on Ya Ha Tinda road.</li> <li>- Reps for Guides &amp; Outfitters have not had anyone they represent in favor of the bison fencing so far.</li> <li>- Controlled burn ignited in Sept in BNP. Feel no notification to stakeholders, helicopters flying during outfitting trips. Not good for tourism or promotion. Oct 19 outfitter went in to clear camp and by that night had to load up because the fire progressed into the Dormer and the Panther. Have not heard anything from BNP. Want to know what is happening.</li> <li>- FOESA fixed generator at Eagle cabin.</li> <li>- Some confusion about Nordegg Area trail planning process. Clarified that a few meetings back we asked for individuals from this group interested in taking part in a sub-committee, and that has formed part of the representation. Regular reporting back to this group on each of the steps that have been taken to date. It is really a plan about connecting what is already out there. Strategic look at what is already on the landscape and being formalized. Change from original plans occurred with the Black Mountain fire last fall, allowed for the acceleration of alternate access using the cat guards.</li> <li>- Joining the Bighorn Dam to Meadows – looked for an alternate route but found 3-4 major crossings and all in shadow of the mountain, so maintenance would be large. Inquired with Sundre Forest Products and they would like to focus on north side for access. Maybe better to connect Bighorn Dam to Nordegg industrial area to river</li> </ul>

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**NEXT MEETING DATE THURSDAY, JUNE 8, 2023 – TENTATIVE**

<b>Action Items</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Assigned To:</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
1.	County to inquire about opening Upper Shunda campground for winter skiing access	Neil Ratcliffe	As soon as possible
2.	Share examples of new apps communicating trail grooming status	Jamie Bruha	As soon as possible
3.	Share Summer-Fall survey data with Standing	Amanda Halawell	Feb
4.	Education OHV/sled, other multi use	Tannis McNabb/ Laura Raivio	Sent to REO
5.	Blake/Garett – coordinate on signage and messaging around trails.	Blake Christianson/ Garrett Schmidt	Feb
6.	Blake/Mike – Scalp trail, touch base regarding the piece around the ranch and a boulder bypass. Consult bio.	Blake Christianson/ Mike Doyle	Feb
7.	Discuss a solution for equestrian panels in FOESA sites	Blake Christianson/ Brad Jones / Dale Marshall/ Sue Comfort	Feb
8.	Contact FOESA re: use of fire crews for tree assessment/removal	Kevin Gagne	Feb/March
9.	Request plowing last section to Cutoff PLRA	Don Livingston	complete
10.	Rocky wildlife biologist to respond to concerns around bison fencing outside of BNP.	Chiara Feder	Feb
11.	Have Calgary wildfire respond to concerns re: fire that came up through Dormer in the fall.	Kris Heemeryck	Feb
12.	Look into better communication with stakeholders who are already in the area of a fire and without internet/cell service.	Kris Heemeryck/Sue Comfort	Feb