

Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan Monitoring: Standing Committee

Meeting Summary

May 30th, 2006, 9:00 AM

Rocky Mountain House Super 8 Motel

In Attendance

Loyal Ma	Deb Schroderous	Jeff Baltzer	Kirstin McKenzie
Roger Marvin	Dennis Schafer	Ken Qually	Jimmy Clark
Clarence Stewart	Jeff Willson	Lorne Hindbo	Stuart Wilson
Lisa Brygidyr			
Yvette Choma	Derry Armstrong	Myles Jensen	Butch Shenfield
Lisa Block	Gary Mandrusiak	Sean Moore	Marina Irwin
Tracey Cove			

Chairpersons

Don Livingston	Wayne Crocker
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Regrets

Rob Hunter	Doug Ritchie	Mike Adolph	Philip Lacerte
Rick Artzen	Ken Schroderous	Melanie Desjardin	Harlan Dixon
Steve Taylor	Christie Clark	Bob Long	Earl Graham
Sandi Phillips	Derek Durocher	James Brady	R.W. (Bobby) Turner
Calvin Rakach	Ken Schroderous		
Jim Allen	Ted Edwards		

Introduction

Butch Shenfield thanked everyone for attending the meeting. Round-table introductions were completed and the following people introduced to the members:

- Nathan Ambler of the Shunda Creek Hostel will be taking the position of Alternate Fixed Commercial. He is unable to attend today's meeting but will be attending future meetings.
- Sean Moore of Alberta Economic Development joins the steering committee as an alternate with Loren Winnick.
- Shell's Tay River Advisory Committee Lisa Brygidyr and Stuart Wilson will be giving a presentation on the Tay River Environmental Enhancement (TREE) Fund.
- Marina Irwin and Tracey Cove of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development are observing the Bighorn Backcountry meetings. The Calgary-area Ghost Forest Land Use Zone received recent legislation.

Activities, Enforcement and Signing

The May long weekend was challenging with the traditional visitor population and added fire near Burnstick Lake and fire bans. A multi-agency task force patrolled the Clearwater Area and assisted with roadblocks near the fire. Visitor statistics have increased the past few years, with public complaints of the environmental impact due to this increase. Stickers were placed on off-highway vehicles after officers completed a vehicle and driver check, with nearly 4000 stickers being used. Vandalism at the gate near Onion Lake resulted in apprehension and charges being laid. Confusion was expressed regarding the fire bans from Alberta Community Development, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and Clearwater County, but the public understood the reasons for the fire bans. Garbage remaining after the long weekend was less than in previous years, with some families assisting with the government staff garbage removal.

The Ghost Forest Land Use Zone and its legislation became effective prior to the long weekend. There is a good general understanding for the reasons of the legislation and many people were previously misinformed or knew only some of the information regarding this forest land use zone.

In the Bighorn Backcountry, some previously identified administrative “housekeeping items” were brought forward for change:

- The boundary between the Upper Clearwater/Ram and Kiska/Willson Forest Use Zones is now moved to the river;
- The Kiska/Willson Forest Land Use Zone boundary was not extended to include the north and south trails near the Cutoff Creek Forest Recreation Area;
- the sunset clause has been extended from 2007 to 2009, permitting an additional two years for regulations to be reviewed;
- specified penalties are under review and being compared with those of other government departments, and
- Aylmer and Pinto Lake Forest Recreation Trails and a section of the Forty Mile Trail have been repealed, as these trails are within forest land use zones.

The south portion of trail leading to the South Ram River was previously closed in 2005 due to severe erosion. A higher and drier trail was identified as an alternative route.

The following concerns were brought forward:

- Fish & Wildlife expressed the winter sheep and elk habitat in this area, and if winter timing restrictions could be placed;
- concern of motorized vehicles and their effects on wildlife, with hunting opportunities being affected;
- consideration to the cost of trail repair and bridges or construction of a new trail, and ensuring that trails and bridges will be re-surfaced in an equestrian-friendly manner (i.e.) large shale is not equestrian-friendly;
- concerns of overnight camping for all users, which could be posted with a sign;
- anticipation that this trail and destination area would be primarily for day use and lunch stops, with return to the forest recreation area for the evening;
- this new destination area has a source of water that will encourage people to extinguish campfires, and
- a new trail may show two options for users and the designated trail will require identification.

Cutoff Creek & Crescent Falls Forest Recreation Areas

Crescent Falls Forest Recreation Area

At previous meetings the Crescent Falls Forest Recreation Area Concept Plan was discussed and accepted by both standing and steering committees. However, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and Alberta Community Development staff met and suggested a different approach. The Crescent Falls Provincial Recreation Area and Forest Recreation Area are located within close proximity, with a connector trail to be constructed. To omit duplication of services and work to install these services, the concept plan indicates the activities will be re-directed to the larger provincial recreation area from the forest recreation area with a connector trail to be constructed to the existing trail system.

The revised concept plan was accepted by the present standing committee members. The steering committee supported the revised plan at the previous meeting. On the concept plan page 5, it was requested the connector trail identify off-highway vehicles and snow vehicles as modes of travel and this addition will be inserted into the document.

It will be confirmed with Clearwater County the potential for snow removal to the lookout point, as currently snow removal is to the upper parking lot.

Cutoff Creek Forest Recreation Area

It was previously asked to delay the acceptance of the Cutoff Creek Forest Recreation Area Concept Plan to permit interested groups time to review and forward comments. Due to cancellation of the previous stakeholder meeting, a re-scheduled meeting will take place at the Rocky Mountain House Provincial Building, 2nd Floor on June 14, 2006. Comments from this meeting will be brought to both the upcoming standing and steering committee meetings.

Concern was previously expressed regarding the damage on the north and south trails caused by vehicles and large trailers. The recommendation to move the forest land use zone boundary east to control vehicle traffic was not implemented at this time. With this boundary not being moved to the east at this time, it is questioned what will be done for these two trails during the next one to two years.

This concept plan will be addressed at the next meeting.

Priorities for Forest Recreation Areas

A list of priorities was developed for each of the five forest recreation area concept plans. A qualification clause was added to this list of priorities as suggested at the previous standing committee meeting.

This list of priorities is a working document, and projects will be undertaken in order of priority or if available to be undertaken at a time of opportunity (equipment immediately available), budget and resources availability.

Trail Planning

At the previous standing and steering committee meetings the topic of trail planning was discussed. Previous planning has focused on the forest recreation areas, with a concept plan developed for each area to identify long-term planning and development. A similar plan for trails will identify the following, with consideration to future use and overall trail systems:

- inventory of trails;
- current situation of each trail;
- areas of concern;
- opportunities;
- trends and statistics, and
- results from monitoring plots.

Both steering and standing committees will work with Derry Armstrong to develop recommendations and collective agreement. There is concern that priorities may be repeatedly postponed and never addressed, and that a time frame should be set to ensure that all priorities are addressed.

It was noted the following trails and areas are currently receiving or scheduled for repair and maintenance:

- Onion Lake and Hummingbird Creek Trails (July 2006);
- Forty Mile Trail, one particular area;
- Ranger Creek Trail;
- Nordegg area and Bighorn Dam area (currently and throughout the summer);
- Crescent Falls Forest Recreation Area and Provincial Recreation Area connector trail (summer 2006);
- trails in the Adopt-A-Trail program, and
- equestrian trails require inventory.

It was commented that trail planning should also consider trails that receive high impact during a short period of time (i.e.) many school groups using the same few trail with a large number of students during May and June. Also, provincial economics may see an increase in motorized and non-motorized recreation purchases with users bring these purchases to the area.

Current trail counters are providing information regarding trends, user numbers and user types that were not previously known. This information will be linked to previously- established monitoring stations.

It was commented that trail planning should also involve trail management, with this reflected in upcoming documents. Funding and resources may be limited.

It was concluded that a plan be developed for trails within each forest land use zone, with one forest land use zone being completed at a time. The Calgary representatives will complete a plan for the trails in the Panther Corners Forest Land Use Zone as this area is managed from the Calgary office. The Bighorn Backcountry Steering and Standing Committees will begin with the trails in the Upper Clearwater/Ram Forest Land Use Zone. Both groups will maintain contact to ensure consistency with the plans and consistency between the Ghost and Bighorn Backcountry committees. It was recommended to develop a website to be able to capture comments from stakeholders.

Tay River Advisory Committee

Stuart Wilson and Lisa Brygidyr from Shell Canada presented the Tay River Environmental Enhancement (TREE) Fund. This initiative was created by Shell Canada and Manal Energy for local ecological or enhancement projects in the Tay River area and surrounding region. A subgroup of TREE was formed to manage to the funding budget and project application/approval process.

One local project involved the Baseline Mountain area. A trail system built for cyclists was eroded during the 2005 flooding. With funding from TREEs, repairs to the trail system and parking lot, with installation of new toilet facilities and bear-proof garbage containers will be completed this month.

Trade Shows, Bighorn Backcountry Brochures & Website

The 2006 revision of the Bighorn Backcountry brochure was distributed. The front cover of the brochure was updated with a photograph of Crescent Falls. Wapiabi Cave general information and closure restrictions are updated in the brochure.

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development participated in the Red Deer Sportsman Show in April. Generally, the public was very understanding to the reasons of trail timing restrictions and many were concerned of the “few riders who are destroying it” for the majority of the other users.

Open Floor

The Alberta Trappers Association annual picnic is being held July 7-9, 2006. Families are invited, with activities for all ages. Please contact Deb Schroderous for more information.

All existing trails must be reviewed on an individual basis to determine trail damage, work required and written approval. All new trails must be approved in writing and are determined in an individual basis.

The Bighorn Backcountry field meeting is scheduled for August 1, 2006.

The Bighorn Backcountry Standing Committee fall meeting will be scheduled for October 17, 2006 at the Rocky Mountain House West Central High School.

