

Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan

Monitoring: Standing Committee

May 29, 2007

Rocky Mountain House Super 8 Motel

In Attendance

Mike Adolph	Cal Rakach	Jeff Wilson	Roger Marvin
Deb Schroderous	James Brady	Lorne Hindbo	Ken Qually
Dennis Schafer	Clarence Stewart	Brent Young	Doug Ritchie
Philip Lacerte	Loyal Ma	Meilssa von Bloedau	Kristin McKenzie
Brian Reis	John Evans	Kevin Wirtanen	Kevin Gagne
Yvette Choma	Wayne Crocker	Derry Armstrong	Bernie Schmitte
Maria Sharpe			

Chairperson

Don Livingston

Regrets

Bob Long	Rob Hunter	Myles Jensen	Cory Wojtowicz
Rick Artzen	Derek Durocher	Marvin Abraham	Jeff Baltzer
Ken Schroderous	Elder Rock Abraham	Earl Graham	R.W. (Bobby) Turner
Christie Clark	Sandi Phillips	Steve Taylor	Rob Popowich
Robin McDonald			

Introduction

Don Livingston thanked everyone for attending the meeting. The following members have joined the Bighorn Backcountry Steering or Standing Committees, or are joining today's meeting to observe:

- Standing Committee Youth Member Alternate John Evans from West Central High School;
- Information Officer Maria Sharpe from Forestry Division;
- Steering Committee member Kevin Gagne, replacing Forest Health Officer Christie Ward;
- Steering Committee member Bernie Schmitte, replacing retired Wildfire Prevention Officer Gary Mandrusiak, and
- Brian Reis from EnCana.

Round-table introductions were completed.

Activities, Enforcement and Signing

Over the May long-weekend, more than 92 officers from municipal, provincial and federal governments patrolled the roads and rivers, checkstops and the field. Overall, the weekend was not as busy as anticipated, possibly due to the rainy weather. Currently, trail counter information is being retrieved to confirm actual numbers on the trails. The busiest areas were the Brazeau Dam area, Sundre area and areas surrounding Calgary located outside of the Ghost Forest Land Use Zone. Areas outside forest land use zones were considerably more chaotic than areas inside forest land use zones, with some users seeking areas “with no rules” or without restricted access for motorized vehicles. Due to wet ground conditions, considerable damage to vegetation and trails was caused by inappropriate motorized vehicle traffic and a large number of users. Considerable garbage including tents, chairs, bar-b-ques and vehicles remained at camping sites and on trails after users left the area.

Below are the statistics for the Clearwater Area:

- 14,769 individuals checked
- 1,125 tickets written
- 3,519 off-highway vehicles checked
- 50 individuals arrested
- 2 deaths
- 18 individuals received a 24-hour driving suspension

In the Bighorn Dam area, considerable damage was caused by off-highway vehicles traveling off the designated trails, rutting the designated trails, driving over signs and general disrespect for the work of the adopt-a-trail volunteer efforts. It has been asked if this area can be closed to off-highway vehicle use for the July long-weekend, as a proactive measure discussed by the Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association. It was recommended that the information kiosk be moved across the dam towards the sign indicating the Adopt-A-Trail. Also, the trail network map can be made available at the information kiosk.

This summer, a forest guardian will be stationed in Nordegg and focus efforts on specific high-use areas including the Bighorn Dam area. The Bighorn Dam and surrounding area is under the Water Development Licence of TransAlta, who has raised concerns over the long-weekend traffic and garbage remaining.

Additional field signs are being installed at trail intersections, to correspond with the revised Bighorn Backcountry brochure. New maps at kiosks are being replaced to reflect the new brochure.

During May, the following work has been completed by Friends of the Eastern Slopes through the efforts of reduced equipment costs, donated heavy equipment use, reduced gravel costs and volunteer hours:

- Eagle Creek Forest Recreation Area
 - widened the road
 - removed bent highlines
 - poured additional gravel
 - added additional wood chips to the equestrian area
 - stock-piled additional gravel for future use
 - current manure in the manure site will be removed and used to re-contour a specific area.

On June 4th the following work will be completed:

- Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area
 - place additional pit run and crushed gravel in the loop, two west –end nodes and the manure storage area
 - stock-pile additional gravel for fire ring installation
 - remove stump piles prior to placing gravel.

Outside of this meeting of May 29, 2007 the following financial figures were given by the umbrella group Friends of the Eastern Slopes as a summary of 2006 financial donations:

- Eagle Creek and Hummingbird Forest Recreation Areas and the Bighorn Campground: total maintenance costs of \$8747.18
 - \$1000 donated by Bowden Light Horse Association
 - \$500 donated by Lacombe Light Horse Association
 - \$1500 donated by the Alberta Equestrian Federation
 - \$300 donated by the Olds Snowmobile Club
 - \$500 donated by the Bighorn Heritage ATV Society
 - the balance of \$4947.18 donated by Friends of the Eastern Slopes.

Sundre Fish & Game Association has funds to put towards the Cutoff Creek area road.

The floating dock at Cow Lake will be installed. Additional outhouses at Cow Lake, the Cutoff Creek area and Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area will be installed.

In the Hummingbird area, low trails in the flood plain that are experiencing erosion will be replaced with high trails.

The Alberta Trappers Association presented prototype signs for use on trails to access trapline cabins. These signs will be posted off the designated trail to inform people who may be confused with the designated and non-designated trails.

Saunders-Alexo Development Node

Derry Armstrong reported that Clearwater County, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture are funding a consulting team to prepare a concept plan for future development of the Saunders-Alexo Development Node. Currently, very little development exists and there is the potential as a tourism area with a trail network. The consulting team will develop a concept plan and interested parties can contact Derry Armstrong for additional information.

Upper Clearwater/Ram Forest Land Use Zone Trail Planning

At the previous Bighorn Backcountry meeting the Upper Clearwater/Ram Forest Land Use Zone Trail Planning Terms of Reference was brought forward to the members for review. Some comments were received and included:

- clarify the existing information;
- expand to include evaluating the plan;
- level of authority and plan approval will be in Rocky Mountain House;
- consider original historic trails that may be better and drier trails than current industry trails in the same general area;
- historic trails may not have included a “staging area” and may be longer in length than current trails;

Derry will amend the terms of reference and proceed with preparation of the trail plan.

Current work has focused on preparing a trail inventory, despite the trail descriptions being very vague and without a lot of detail. Original information was from 1980s reports and flooding or fires may have occurred since that time and moved the trails or changed the trails. Members are asked to forward to Derry any additional or missing information for the trail inventory. Also, mountain biking was not popular 25 years ago and may not be addressed in the current inventory. Please forward information to Derry by June 29th.

In order to fill gaps in the existing trail inventory, field work will be planned for several priority trails including:

- south Scalp and north Clearwater areas;
- Lost Guide Canyon;
- Ranger Creek area;
- South Ram area;
- central Headwaters area;
- North Ram area;
- day use trails near Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area, and
- day use trails near Ya Ha Tinda / Scalp Creek areas.

R11 Forest Management Plan

The R11 Forest Management Plan incorporates the same boundaries as the Bighorn Backcountry and coordinates FiresSmart, timber harvesting, prescribed burning and mountain pine beetle efforts. Other considerations included:

- natural range of variability;
- residual fire;
- fire cycles;
- fire risk analysis;
- watershed assessments;
- Foothills Model Forest grizzly bear studies;
- tourism values, and
- computer modeling of the area (before and after prescribed burns).

Originally 64 letters to stakeholders were mailed, and from these stakeholders a Charette was formed. Over a three-day period the Charette members defined management plan values, objectives, indicators and targets (VOITs) and a draft map for prescribed burns and mechanical treatment. From these recommendations a Draft R11 Forest Management Plan was compiled and reviewed by the Charette members and the government planning team, and is currently posted on the R11 Forest Management Plan website. Until June 29th this draft plan can be reviewed at <http://www.srd.gov.ab.ca/fieldoffices/clearwater/r11/default.aspx> and comments can be referred to Kevin Gagne.

Bighorn Backcountry Extreme Adventuring

The Bighorn Backcountry has current and future opportunities for extreme adventuring, with most taking place in the Kiska/Willson Forest Land Use Zone. This includes white-water canoe and kayaking, multi-pitch rock and ice climbing, caving, alpine climbing and Via Freatta. Currently, there is not a standard or a permit required for guiding or instructing these activities inside the Bighorn Backcountry, other than current commercial permits required by Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. In Parks Canada areas and British Columbia insurance and a permit are required.

The Association of Canadian Mountain Guides (ACMG) offers courses and certification for a variety of activities, and Paddle Canada offers water courses. It was questioned if the Bighorn Backcountry should require extreme adventure guides to be certified or a set of standards be developed for these commercial operators. Currently in the province, only Commercial Trail Riding operators outside Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture areas require a permit, bond and insurance. In the 1970s these Commercial Trail Riding operators requested the government regulate these activities and the operators.

Other items to consider:

- infrastructure including toilets, parking and emergency services;
- trail counter information;
- many visitors and non-resident commercial operators are using the Bighorn Backcountry as no permits or certification are required;
- commercial operators would require time to plan for additional training, company activities, etc., and
- a permit system assists the government during emergencies of wildfires and flooding, planned prescribed burns and trail work.

It was requested to obtain from Parks Canada and Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture what is required for commercial operators. Standing committee member will obtain information from Association of Canadian Mountain Guides. Kananaskis Country and local Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture office will be asked the number of annual permits and government hours required to maintain this permit system. Alberta Sustainable Resource Development will contact commercial operators in regards to the number of annual clients.

Bighorn Backcountry Brochure

The updated Bighorn Backcountry brochure was distributed to all members. The brochures were distributed beginning the May long-weekend, and 25,000 copies were printed. Special thanks for Anne Murphy for updating the local maps and to Gwen Edge for assembling the entire brochure and giving it the “new and improved” appearance. The following changes were made to update the brochure:

- folded size of the brochure, front cover, and most legend colours to reflect the Ghost Forest Land Use Zone and Hinton/Coal Branch brochures and Alberta road maps;
- updated trails and roads;
- “blow-out” maps of Cutoff Creek, Bighorn Dam and Hummingbird trail networks, with an alpha-numerical point at main intersections corresponding to signs in the field;
- updated user and landscape photographs all taken within the boundaries of the Bighorn Backcountry;
- expanded and updated information on tourism and ethics.

The information kiosk signs and the website will be updated during the month of June. It was recommended to put brochures at all Rocky Mountain House fuel stations and real estate offices, and sports stores in Edmonton and Calgary.

Open Floor

Shell Oil Company and the Tay River Advisory Committee have donated over \$300,000 towards environmental and recreation projects including toilet facilities, wildlife collars and fisheries funding. The final application is 2007/2008. It was brought forward that a shift in user education is required, as the garbage and trail non-compliance remains an issue. It was recommend a brochure to target the upcoming generation of users, indicating statistics, penalties, confiscation of property and photos of miss-use. Anyone wishing to become involved, please contact Yvette for further information and a contact person.

In applicable areas, signs will be installed indicating the dogs must be in a maximum two metre leash and the \$172 penalty for non-compliance.

July 6, 7 and 8, 2007 is the annual Alberta Trappers Association conference.

A Bighorn Backcountry Standing Committee off-highway vehicle field day is scheduled for August 8, 2007. Off-highway vehicles will be loaded on trailers August 7th or the morning of August 8th at the Rocky Mountain House government warehouse (4516-52 Avenue). Departure time on August 8th will be the latest 9:00 AM. For those traveling from the south, we anticipate to be at the Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area at 10:30 AM. Bag lunches and beverages will be supplied. Please bring appropriate clothing and safety equipment. A reminder will be forwarded closer to the date.

The fall Bighorn Backcountry meeting will be October 2, 2007, 9:00 AM at the Rocky Mountain House Super 8 Motel.