

Bighorn Backcountry

Access Management Plan

Monitoring: Standing Committee

Meeting Summary

October 18, 2005, 9:00 AM

Rocky Mountain House Super 8 Motel

In Attendance

Sandi Phillips	Calvin Rakach	Deb Schroderous	James Brady
Roger Marvin	Lorne Hindbo	Kristin McKenzie	Harlan Dixon
Dennis Schafer	Clarence Stewart	Loyal Ma	Jeff Baltzer
Ken Qually	Earl Graham		
Yvette Choma	Derry Armstrong	Marian Jones	Kevin Gagne
Myles Jensen	Butch Shenfield	Ted Edwards	Margarete Hee

Chairpersons

Don Livingston	Wayne Crocker
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Regrets

Rob Hunter	Doug Ritchie	Mike Adolph	Philip Lacerte
Rick Artzen	Ken Schroderous	Robin McDonald	Jeff Willson
Derek Durocher	Steve Taylor	Christie Clark	Bob Long
Gary Mandrusiak	R.W. (Bobby) Turner		

Introduction

Butch Shenfield thanked everyone for attending the meeting. Several individuals were introduced to the group:

- Ted Edwards, Recreation Management Specialist has replaced Anne Anderson on the Steering Committee;
- Bonnie Brewer will no longer be filling the position of Fixed Commercial Alternate. **ACTION:** This position will require replacement.
- Christie Ward, Forest Health Officer, will be replacing Dan Lux on the Steering Committee;
- Marian Jones, Weed Management Coordinator, will be giving a presentation on invasive plants;
- Kevin Gagne, Senior Area Forester, will be giving a presentation on the R11 Forest Management Plan;
- Dennis Lang and Peter William of Shell, not yet present but to give a presentation on coalbed methane.
- Earl Graham from Clearwater County.

Activities, Enforcement and Signing

Forest Land Use Zone compliance remains the same as the previous year, including non-compliance of closures and vandalism/theft of signs. As trail closure signs may not be effective, alternate signs of a small green arrow on a bright background will be used to indicate trails that are open for use while attempting to create a balance between too many and too few signs. Volunteer organizations expressed frustration due to their signing funds and volunteer hours resulting in theft and vandalism. Some non-motorized users believe that trail etiquette signs are meant only for motorized users and may proceed with unethical trail use. Education regarding trail etiquette and alternate use is still required.

Due to the summer flooding the staff assisted Clearwater County with manning road barricades and county closures. Due to wet conditions, overuse and safety concerns, it was requested by the trail stewards and the Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association to close the Bighorn Dam area during the August long weekend. Manned barricades of government staff and Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association volunteers educated the public on the reasons for the area closure. Trail counters indicate an increase use in 2006 from previous years. The Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association wants to promote future closures and this may be the only option when safety is a concern, ground conditions are unable to recover from use and/or trail stewards are unable to maintain trails. It was noted that due to the high summer rainfall displacement areas and trails require post-assessment. **ACTION:** Monitoring will be required.

Multi-agency work sessions could be organized to assist current trail stewards, with the 4H Club volunteering as part of their membership criteria.

The North Ram River Trail was closed prior to August 15th due to safety concerns as a result of considerable rain and damage to the trail.

The Alberta Snowmobile Association questioned if sign standards could be developed. The government is currently developing/confirming these standards.

There is concern that off-highway vehicle designated trails may be deceiving as many non-motorized users create new trails. Repeated use of the non-motorized trail may appear that this trail is the main trail, resulting in motorized use on the new trail.

The Alberta Wilderness Association is encouraging specific area closures for equestrian users due to trail damage and non-recovery of vegetation. The organization has continued to use trail counters and has evaluated equestrian damage in specific areas. A standing committee member agreed that trails should be closed if not suitable to equestrian use.

By the end of October, the Alberta Trappers Association members will install all trappers signs for use on trails.

It was questioned with the increase use in the area and non-recovery of trails, why the government does not limit the numbers of users in an area or on trails or have hunting area closures surrounding the Big Horn Reserve. Previously a permit system was discussed that would limit the number of users in an area or on a trail. A proactive not reactive approach to trails is required with consideration of user numbers.

It was recommended a cooperative video of several agencies could be produced for the Bighorn Backcountry website, similar to those of the 4H Club and Parks Canada.

ACTION: Sustainable Resource Development will inquire regarding the website and videos of the above-mentioned examples.

It was suggested the Standing Committee create a five or 10-year plan to manage areas that will include funding, infrastructure and area and trail closures to assist volunteers and direct maintenance. **ACTION:** An inventory will be required.

Cutoff Creek, Crescent Falls & Blackstone Gap Forest Recreation Areas

The Standing and Steering Committees began working on draft concept plans for the forest recreation areas, with Hummingbird and Eagle Creek Forest Recreation Area Concept Plans endorsed by both committees.

Crescent Falls Forest Recreation Area

The forest recreation area is adjacent to the provincial recreation area inside the Kiska/Willson Forest Land Use Zone. The proposal includes:

- repair what currently exists, including the road;
- build a small and proper parking area and consider toilet installation.

This is to be only a staging area without overnight camping. It was questioned if Alberta Community Development or Alberta Sustainable Resource Development would manage this site due to the provincial recreation area's close proximity. Recommendation was given that this be resolved by the government and implemented by the appropriate agency. There were no objections or comments from the Standing Committee members.

Blackstone Gap Forest Recreation Area

This forest recreation area is an informal area adjacent to the Blackstone/Wapiabi Forest Land Use Zone. The draft concept plan noted that future industry road improvements will result in an increase of use. The current forest recreation area is located in a steep valley, but a good quality staging area could be developed outside this current forest recreation area boundary and down the valley. It was recommended to reserve this new area as a potential site for development.

As eventual road access will not entirely follow the current road, it was recommended to work with industry and Clearwater County for the current road to become a designated trail and the areas available for recreation users. Expense will be reduced if work can be completed when heavy equipment is in the area. It was recommended to have both the forest management area holder and oil companies attend an upcoming standing committee meeting to present their future plans.

It was agreed that the above proposals are recommendations to be brought forward to Clearwater County. The draft concept plan will be revised and sent to all members.

Cutoff Creek Forest Recreation Area

As current camping is in sporadic areas, it was questioned if a new camping area could be found inside the forest recreation area boundary. It was also recommended to obtain a good quality site in the Beaver Lake area located above the Clearwater River valley.

Outside the forest land use zone an old seismic line is frequently used by wagon teams but is damaged from on-highway vehicle use. The boundary between the Upper Clearwater/Ram and Kiska/Willson Forest Land Use Zones is not a natural feature and causes confusion to users. The following recommendations were discussed:

- Approach the forest management area holder if the Kiska/Willson Forest Land Use Zone boundary could be moved to the east permitting the old seismic line to be managed for motorized vehicle use. If this is not favorable, it was recommended to describe the north and south roads as part of the forest land use zone or as forest recreation trails.
- The boundary between the Upper Clearwater/Ram and Kiska/Willson Forest Land Use Zones be moved to the right bank of the Clearwater River.

ACTION: Confirm for current disposition and holder of north and south roads.

The draft concept plan will be revised and brought back to the original stakeholders who were previously met.

Priorities for Forest Recreation Areas

Previous comments indicated prioritization of items for forest recreation areas was required. Derry Armstrong distributed the proposed implementation priorities with the following explanation:

- *High Priorities* indicate the repair of current problems;
- *Medium Priorities* indicate the planning for new future sites or expanding current existing sites, and
- *Low Priorities* indicate refinements or improvements.

These priorities will be used as a planning tool for organizations wishing to invest funds or volunteer hours towards a project. There was concern that due to the hill in Cutoff Creek Forest Recreation Area a suitable camping area does not exist. This item will be discussed at the next meeting.

Trails 101

Wayne Crocker gave a presentation on trails and their deterioration with the following comments brought forward:

- There are too few volunteer stewards for the number of trail users;
- Trail and area closures may be required;
- Sign vandalism and theft and proper amount of signs is a concern;
- Overall increasing number of users, and
- The four “Es” are: Education, Evaluation, Engineering and Enforcement.

Enculturation could be added as the fifth.

It was recommended that general ethics education is important. A Forest EdWest Conference will be held in Banff during January and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development will be giving a presentation. A contact name will be supplied for individuals wishing to bring items forward at this conference.

A copy of the sign for Wapiabi Cave & Trail was presented with signs being posted at the trailhead and cave entrance. Research from Alberta Community Development of the Cadomin Cave was completed and Wapiabi Cave closure dates and August distance restrictions are based on biologists' recommendations. There is consideration of placing a counter near the cave entrance.

R11 Forest Management Plan

Kevin Gagne presented the R11 Forest Management Plan. This public Charrette process took place at Goldeye Centre in September. Through this process the Charrette members developed values, objectives, indicators and targets and a map for non-commercial harvesting and prescribed burning in the Bighorn Backcountry. The government recommendations and map are being inserted in the Charrette recommendations and map with final revisions currently being completed.

It was questioned with the current cost of timber why prescribed burning would be considered over harvesting. Many areas in the R11 do not have road access and some areas that have road access will receive harvesting.

Caraway and Weed Free Feed

Marian Jones gave a presentation on invasive plants. There is concern in specific areas for the current caraway population to expand and move into the backcountry. Users are encouraged to recognize invasive plants and know how to prevent the spread of existing infestations and introduction of new infestations. Prevention is the easier, most economical and most effective form of invasive plant control.

Weed free feed is currently required in the United States backcountry and Parks Canada. It was questioned if this will become the future of the Bighorn Backcountry. The cost of weed free feed higher but not much more than regular feed. The discussion of weed free feed and the backcountry was brought forward at the initial standing committee meetings but was not accepted. Ideally, horses should be fed weed-free feed for 48 hours prior to entering the backcountry and during their backcountry stay.

There was concern that weed free feed may be difficult to enforce and many locals do not grow this feed. It was commented that this must be practical, and education is important. Marion has previously and continues to offer her services and talks to any group.

Revised Brochure Distribution & trade Show Summary

Yvette Choma distributed the May 2005 revision of the Bighorn Backcountry brochure. Ten thousand copies have been printed with revisions based on the recommendations of the standing and steering committees. For additional copies please contact Yvette.

The Bighorn Backcountry was presented at two recent trade shows:

- Rocky Cruise-In (August, Rocky Arena)
 - on-highway motorcycle show with over 500 people attending
 - trade booth, outdoor rides, bike competitions
 - mostly single people or couples of age 50 and over
 - many people were visitors from out of province and country with many local people visiting the Bighorn Backcountry for recreation.
- Canadian Off-Road Expo (September, Red Deer Westerner Park)
 - on-highway and off-highway vehicles with over 5000 people attending
 - trade booths, outdoor events in parking area
 - mostly local families (Red Deer and surrounding area), many who visit the Ghost/Waiparous and Bighorn Backcountry areas
 - comments about illegal and unethical/irresponsible use, people leaving garbage, overall non-compliance of some users.

Contractors for Provincial Recreation Areas

Operators are not interested in contracts for small provincial recreation areas.

The North Ram Provincial Recreation Area will be indefinitely closed due to the summer flood damage. It is now an offence to steal wood or deposit garbage in a provincial recreation area, with a penalty of \$287.00.

It was brought forward that off-highway vehicles riding on roads in Clearwater County require signal lights and similar equipment to an on-highway vehicle. Clearwater County will be approached regarding their by-law, with the understanding that licence of occupations and country roads are used by many people for recreation.

Hummingbird and Eagle Creek Forest Recreation Area

Photos of the work completed at the two forest recreation areas were distributed.

Several organizations have contributed funds or product and/or volunteer work to the following areas:

- Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area
 - Alberta Equestrian Federation
 - Friends of the Eastern Slopes
 - Caroline Snowmobile Club
 - Clearwater County completed road work.
- Eagle Creek Forest Recreation Area
 - Alberta Equestrian Federation
 - Friends of the Eastern Slopes
 - Sundre Forest Products donated wood chips.

- Bighorn Campground
 - Friends of the Easter Slopes
 - Shell Canada
 - Suncor Energy
 - Clearwater County provided a reduced cost for gravel.

Considerable volunteer time and funding has been invested in these areas in 2005 with additional volunteer time and funding allocated for future projects at Eagle Creek Forest Recreation Area.

Open Floor and Upcoming Meeting

Names for backcountry trails will be developed through an essay contest initiated by a standing committee member. It was also recommended a field trip for standing committee members for a future meeting, with a 12-passenger van allocated for transportation.

It was identified that the campground in the Panther Corners Forest Recreation Area requires sign maintenance, highline rails and designated manure site, and the toilets could be an area for posting campground rules. **ACTION:** Alberta Sustainable Resource Development will re-install signs and the campground rules at the Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area will used as a foundation.

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 21, 2006.