

Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan Monitoring: Standing Committee

Meeting Summary September 8, 2003 Rocky Mountain House

In Attendance

Nathan Moore	Ken Zelt	Clarence Stewart	Jim Allen
Lorne Hindbo	Dennis Schafer	Mike Adolph	Don Livingston
Jack Walker	Calvin Rakach	James Brady	Derry Armstrong
Bob Haagsma			Rita Stagman

Chairperson

Butch Shenfield

Regrets

Cheri Adolph	Rick Artzen	Derek Durocher	Doug Ritchie
Loyal Ma	Rob Hunter	Deb Schroderous	R.W. Turner
Greg Mallo	Phil Lacerte	Bob Long	Jimmy Wildman
Norm McCallum	Richard Smith	Jeff Wilson	Bonnie Brewer
Christy Blake			

Introduction

Butch Shenfield welcomed everyone to the meeting. He gave a member update on the equestrian representation: Ken Zelt as the Equestrian Representative and Jack Walker as the Equestrian Alternate. Round table introductions were completed.

A review of the June 16, 2003 meeting summary minutes was given.

Activity Updates: Don Livingston

Signs and Interpretive / Educational Needs

Generally, compliance has been good. Approximately 75% of written tickets were for registration violations and 25% for trail non-compliance.

The final kiosk is being installed. The map side of the brochure is in all kiosks, with the description and regulation side to be printed and installed.

Many signs are being damaged from animals eating the wood, and the replacement of these signs has begun with aluminum signs. In some locations, the sign wording is

unclear and / or lengthy, which may be resulting in signs not being read. A review of these signs, with the possible reduction of words and replacement with a symbol (eg green circle with a snow vehicle, is being reviewed. The North Ram, Kiska / Willson Forest Land Use Zone (FLUZ), Onion Lake Trail, and Canary Creek Trail require larger signs with reflective lettering. Over time, a number of signs may be able to be reduced as trails that are not being used become re-vegetated or reclaimed. Dues to safety reasons signs are not to be located in the middle of the trail; however, signs located to side of a trail is acceptable. Also for safety reasons, positioning of signs as required and removal of signs will be completed during the off- season (eg) 40 Mile.

It was suggested to advertise in the fishing, hunting, and draw regulations, and in the Outdoor Alberta magazine. Also, a link from the Fish & Wildlife Division (FWD) website to the Bighorn Backcountry website is being created by Communications in Edmonton.

Monitoring Plots and Information

As other backcountry work and provincial fire activity was taking a great amount of time, Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) has contracted the plot implementation to an independent contractor.

Trail counters are in place (both beam counters and ground counters). The Alberta Wilderness Association also has several ground counters also in place. Data from counters will be reviewed to indicate the direction, amount, and seasonal changes of activity on the trails.

Adopt-A-Trail 2004 Priority: Upcoming Seasonal Changes and Trail Detail

The area will require a high precipitation year to evaluate where more normal problems exist. Currently, the following are some concerns:

- The Bighorn Dam Trail has corduroy in place for wet areas.
- The Onion Lake Road will have some areas seeded this fall.
- Some areas in the Blackstone / Wapiabi FLUZ may also be seeded this fall (or next spring).
- Ya-Ha-Tinda Trail: The window for construction is very limited. The Steering Committee members will be in the field mid – September to check the area for possible construction. The trail will be open from January 1 to April 30 with a number of conditions. By late October it should be known the status of potential trail construction.
- Pleasant Valley: Rutting has been occurring on the north end and some maintenance is required to move the trail to a harder side.
- The trail can be moved 10-20 meters to east to remove the trail from Forbidden Creek. This will be a priority for the year and will discussed at next meeting.

- The trail from the viewpoint to Ram River / Canary Creek: There is some major damage and dangerous erosion is occurring on the trail. The trail

should possibly end at the viewpoint and provide a large turn around. The addition of one kilometer of trail on the Monument or Onion Lake Trail could return the lost one kilometer of trail from this change.

Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area (FRA)

Derry Armstrong presented the Hummingbird FRA Concept Plan Draft. It is intended as a long-term plan for the area to accommodate present usage. The intent is to have the concept remain simple and cost effective, as SRD will not be funding the development and upgrading.

Comments from the June 18, 2003 meeting as to what the group viewed as concerns and considerations for the area were discussed. The existing road is in poor repair for the last 4.9 km, with random campsites located along the road in both good locations and poor locations, with the flood plain and drainage to be considered. Creek damage is occurring and fish habitat and wildlife corridors could be threatened. Lack of toilet facilities creates health concerns.

The map and chart were reviewed, with ten new potential sites identified based upon land drainage and level. There are very limited opportunities at the Hummingbird FRA for camping, as it is narrow and is a wildlife corridor. Potential new sites that are heavily treed could have a contractor hired to clear and stump the area.

Concept Plan Alternatives

- Existing random sites: The plan is to sequence-out the use of the poorer sites as new sites are developed. It must be ensured that the total cumulative effect of the development is viewed. Random sites cannot be closed until new and improved sites are available.
- Design of new camping sites: 100 meter x 60 meter dimension, with trees separating the road and next site for privacy and dust control. Toilets are to be built to accommodate walking distance from campsites and efficient usage.
- Alternative A - Eastern Development
Develop from Highway 734 (Forestry Trunk Road) into the Hummingbird FRA. The road is in fair condition on this end and road construction could be at a low cost. It does not impact narrow wildlife corridors. Existing trails along the road could be further developed to serve as off-highway vehicle (OHV) trails and equestrian trails. It would be best if trails could be designated as to use, but this may not be possible. By developing a trail network, the OHV traffic on the main road would be reduced.

It was mentioned the potential for Ram Falls (Community Development, Parks & Protected Areas) to set aside a multi-use area. Presently, OHVs are

not allowed, and sites could be created for individual camping (Hummingbird FRA would be set up for more group camping).

During the winter, there is a need to snow plough a section of road to the gravel pit or “J” location on map. This will provide parking for snow vehicle truck and trailers as Highway 734 becomes dangerous with all vehicles parked on roadside.

- Alternative B – Western development
This area would have high road construction costs, but presently the usage is highest in this area. Area south of “A” could remain as a random site, with the bowl and washout areas requiring reclamation due to poor drainage and erosion. Site “C” is presently well-used, but requires access to this area from the road's side and not the river's side. The road past “C” is very poor, and Clearwater County is responsible for maintenance of the entire road. The need to improve the road will be taken to county council (it will not become a high all-weather road, but it will be much improved).

Site “D” is not a good site as it is narrow and would threaten the wildlife corridor. Concern was expressed over the ability to get log trucks into the area over the hill beyond the equestrian camp for purposes of hauling trees from logging campsite spots.

Round Table on Alternatives

The sequence process is recommended as a good idea, and it is important to remove poor random sites and see a combination of east and west development. It was recommended that “J” or “H” should be developed over “I” due to the latter being a sheep corridor. There is a concern with the road being improved the entire way, as the present sub-standard road provides some four-wheel challenge and a total upgraded may result in the seeking of other areas for the challenge.

Concern was expressed with the cost of the western road development and the wildlife; however, the greatest number of campers travel to the west and this will create pressure to develop the west. Therefore, there will be the need to have a combination of east and west development. The moving the trailheads for wildlife and financial reasons should also be explored. Ample parking will also be required.

It was suggested the possibility of seasonal closures for parts of the areas greatest affected by the wildlife corridors (eg) December 1 to July 1 closure for wildlife concerns beyond the Hummingbird FRA. It was also suggested that the trails could be used, but overnight camping not permitted in the west area during seasonal closure.

During the winter, there is the need to have the road ploughed to the gravel pit to reduce roadside parking of snow vehicle units on Highway 734. A winter parking area in the eastern portion would increase the safety for ice climbing vehicles, with a possible day

use area at Ram Falls. Trails around the road should be designated equestrian and OHV to reduce safety issues.

It was suggested that equestrian users should be near the trailhead, and the existing pattern of usage should be reviewed and considered in development plan. Manure issues must be addressed.

Concern was noted that if both areas are developed and it will encourage camping throughout the area. Development should happen from the eastern end and close off west end. Small tenting areas could be created at trailheads.

Water

Water needs are to be addressed. It was noted that combined camping and toilet facilities cannot be located near the river.

Other Recommendations and Concerns

- There is severe erosion in some areas and erosion control and repair is required.
- It was questioned if group sites should be gated.
- Commercial Outfitter's Base Camp: individual base camps, shared based camps between more than one outfitter, and / or combined outfitter with group camp site. A shared base camp with existing facilities makes best sense as there is the need for corrals and other out buildings.
- Speed limit should be implemented at 30 km/hr for the main road. As the road condition is improved, people will tend to drive faster so the enforced speed limit is for safety. It will be taken to county council for recommendation.
Also try to avoid OHV activity on the road.
- Entrance and information signage should reflect the development as it occurs and the regulations for managing the area.
- Circulation Trail: to confirm the extent of the present trail system. These trails should be formalized on a map with the designation of the trails to be viewed.
- Manure Storage: The collection of manure and returning it home is fine for shorter stays, but is difficult for longer stays. A central storage location could be the collection point where manure is later removed and spread (perhaps the old landfill site). The storage / collection site must be within a reasonable distance from animal location, to encourage use.
- Stock watering and potable water: Supplied potable water must continue to have well-testing completed. It was recommended not to supply potable water and post water sources as non-potable. It was decided against a central horse trough, and that water supplied to horses needs to be site specific and addressed as development occurs.
- Boundary: The FRA should cover the entire valley, beginning at the west end of the gravel pit and continuing to the unnamed creek in the west. Concern was expressed about the FRA's northern distance from the river and if it is

- necessary to follow the Alberta Township Survey System.
- As SRD will not be funding this development, an organization will be needed to help manage the development and funds.
- Detailed design and site-specific adaptation will be needed as development proceeds.

Phasing

Derry Armstrong will make changes to the document, send a revised copy to all committee members for feedback, and then bring document back to group for formal approval. After approval, the document will be posted on the Bighorn Backcountry website. The first stage of implementation is to have possible tree removal areas identified, considering providing a large enough volume to make it economical for a logging company to reduce overall costs.

Toilets could be installed at sections “A”, “C” and “H.” Toilet tanks may be supplied by a known source, and installed underground within four to six weeks.

Possibly, while a backhoe is in the area, some erosion control in poorer random sites could be completed.

Clearwater County’s interest in creating a user-pay system for the Green Zone was discussed. It was suggested the monies collected would go back to the area. This initiative is being discussed within four counties along the eastern slopes.

The committee recommended viewing an estimate cost of unit items and maintenance.

Student Application

The group was informed that there were two applications received but one withdrew after reconsidering the workload. The one application is from a student that would be recommended to the Standing Committee.

The word for more applications will be promoted, with a deadline of November 1, 2003. A selection will be made by December 1, 2003. The selection committee will include three to five people from Standing and Steering Committees, with the student application to be sent to Butch Shenfield at SRD office.

Students that have been involved in “Operation Sustainable Resources” will be contacted to get some names of youths active in these issues.

Ya-Ha-Tinda Trail

In two weeks the Steering Committee will be touring the route and making their assessment of the proposed trail. This topic will be placed on the agenda of the next meeting of the Standing Committee.

Other FRAs

The group was agreeable to the Hummingbird FRA Concept Plan being applied to the four other FRAs in the Bighorn Backcountry. The order of priority will be Eagle Creek FRA, Cutoff Creek FRA, Crescent Falls FRA, and the Blackstone. Derry Armstrong will proceed with the evaluations of the next sites.

The next meeting will be scheduled for November 26, 2003.