

Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan

Monitoring: Standing Committee

Meeting Summary

June 11, 2009 9:00 AM

Red Deer College, Rocky Mountain House

In Attendance

Myles Jensen	Rita Stagman	Rob Popowich	Gordon Sanders
Yvette Choma	Derry Armstrong	Kevin Wirtanen	Paul Radchenko
Lorne Hindbo	Ken Qually	James Brady	Dennis Schafer
Clarence Stewart	Roger Marvin	Brent Young	Loyal Ma
Neil Godlonton	Dick Wymenga	Bernie Schmitte	Cal Rakach

Chairperson

Don Livingston

Regrets

Wayne Crocker	Cory Wojtowicz	Kevin Gagne	Cory Wojtowicz
Roger Meyer	Chiara Feder	Rick Artzen	Christie Young
Phil Lacerte	Robin McDonald	Marvin Abraham	Elder Rock Abraham
Mike Adolph	Doug Ritchie	John Evans	Kristin McKenzie
Sandi Phillips	Rob Hunter	R.W. Tuner	Bob Long
Steve Taylor	Jeff Willson	Jeff Baltzer	Derek Durocher

Introduction

Don Livingston thanked everyone for attending the meeting. Thank you to Jeff Baltzer for arranging the room at Red Deer College, and to McDonald's Restaurant Rocky Mountain House for the coffee.

Round- table introductions were completed.

Activities, Enforcement and Signing

As requested by the standing committee on behalf of the trail stewards, the Bighorn Dam area is restricted from off-highway vehicles use until July 1, 2009. Very few negative comments were received and compliance has been good. During the May long-weekend there was some sign vandalism and non-compliance. TransAlta has concerns with off-highway vehicle use on the dam structure, soil erosion and potential damage to instruments.

In the Clearwater Area during the May long-weekend there were fewer visitors than in previous years. The multi-agency task force was slightly smaller than 2008. The success of this Clearwater Area task force has been implemented provincially. The long weekend Sunday snow resulted in a mass exit and many sites remained with garbage and this resulted in wildlife issues. A new legislation indicates that a camp site must be kept clean at all times. Below is the summary of the Clearwater Area task force:

NM and NM* = no measure

ITEM	YEAR					
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
TASKFORCE OFFICERS	NM*	NM*	NM*	100	132	108
PEOPLE CHECKED	4,676	7,463	10,187	14,769	17,006	7662+
OHV'S CHECKED	1,937	2,980	3,550	3,519	2869	1635
MONSTER TRUCKS	45 +	15 +	20	31	40	20+
HORSES	51	106	100 +	100 +	100+	100+
JET BOATS	3	12	7	7	5	7
CANOES	0	0	0	35	10	15+
WRITTEN TICKETS	76	342	513	870	1051	1028
WRITTEN WARNINGS	30	32	44	50	90	NM
VERBAL WARNINGS	NM*	350 +	402 +	500 +	500+	346+
IMPAIRED DRIVERS	NM*	8	5	7	8	24
24 HR SUSPENSIONS	NM*	NM*	NM*	18	14	NM
AMBULANCE CALLS	NM*	24 +	22 +	6	12+	NM
ARRESTS	NM*	28	24	50	14	48
ABANDONED/DAMAGED VEHICLES	NM*	NM*	2	5	5	2
ABANDONED FIRES	NM*	NM*	14	25	22	25

Signing in the Terishshner Creek area is being completed. These signs, reflective of the new 2009 brochure, will assist users with trail navigation.

After the previous standing committee meeting it was asked if snow vehicle use could be extended to June 30 on trails with timing restrictions. There is concern that May is wildlife calving season, and snow will remain only at upper elevations. During the less frequent years when late snowfall does occur, this request for snow vehicle use can be viewed at that time.

Thank you to Gord Sanders and Neil Godlonton for the trapper signs on the trapper access trails. These signs help the public differentiate between trapper access trails and the designed trails, resulting in better compliance.

Traffic counter data is being checked every few weeks to ensure counters and batteries are working. This data is posted on the Bighorn Backcountry website.

Some ice climbing areas are experiencing significant ground damage from climbers' crampons. It was suggested grant money from Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC) could be put towards the hardening of these areas. Frequently-used winter and summer climbing areas may be located inside Alberta Parks and Protected Areas and these areas can be closed if some maintenance work is not completed by users.

Prescribed Burning

Prescribed burns were completed for the purposes of eliminating pine susceptible to Mountain Pine Beetle, to bring natural fire regime into the landscape and to provide a landscape break between Parks Canada and Public Lands.

Ya Ha Tinda area

- This is a combined effort of Parks Canada and the Department.
- This burn was initiated by Parks Canada on the Ya Ha Tinda ranch area. The burn moved onto Public Lands.
- Approximately 2000 hectares burned.
- The Scalp and Skeleton Creek Trails are closed. Parks Canada has closed some trails on the ranch. It is requested to Friends of the Eastern Slopes to add a comment to their newsletter for users to be aware of trees that may fall and visible smoke.

South Idlewilde

- This is a combined effort of the Alberta Conservation Association and the Department.
- Approximately 15 hectares burned.

Upper Saskatchewan

- This is a combined effort of Parks Canada and the Department.
- Approximately 4000 hectares burned, plus 800 hectares in Banff National Park.
- Some green patches remain, and these will be mapped and evaluated.
- The south side of the river is less susceptible to Mountain Pine Beetle and this area is scheduled for a future prescribed burn.

Five Year Review

The Department previously committed to an implementation review of the Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan. The survey was given to all members and then submitted to Derry Armstrong for summarization. This summary has been given to the Department and an assessment of the information will be completed.

Due to budget constraints, a decision will be made in regards to the completion of the report. This report will contain members' comments and any concerns to be addressed.

Kiska/Willson Forest Land Use Zone Trail Inventory

An inventory of the trails in the Kiska/Willson Forest Land Use Zone began in 2008. Currently there exists a large volume of information from the field data received. The Department staff completed the field work, mapping and digital library.

Bighorn Dam Area

- Considerable volunteer efforts on the trail, a staging area, trail navigation signs and information kiosk make this area a success story and model for other areas.
- Most trails are in good condition with only a few segments having concerns. Some unmanaged trails west of the dam lead users to driving along Highway 734.
- Inventory was not completed on the TransAlta lease. TransAlta has concerns regarding users on the lease and safety issues. Currently, TransAlta gives the public permission to drive and camp on their lease.
- Some trails lead to the Big Horn Reserve and unauthorized traffic on the reserve.
- The North Ram Trail was included in the inventory. This trail needs considerable work due to the severe wash-out and erosion.

Crescent Falls Area

- Near the Crescent Falls Provincial Recreation Area exists a formal staging area, information kiosk and a trail network in good condition as the land is high and dry. However, some trails leading into the provincial recreation area require signs to indicate a dead end.
- Trails in the Terkishner Creek area are wet and muddy. There is the opportunity for a viewpoint along an old resource road that is in good condition, a kiosk staging area at Highway 11 and potential loop trails.
- Highway 11 receives considerable off-highway vehicle use and is a side slope.

Nordegg Area

- The south portion is a series of old coal roads in good condition with a few steep trails.
- The north portion has wet ground, less activity and some trails on seismic lines.
- The future Rail Trail to the east leads to the Nordegg area.
- Conflicts exist between non-motorized and motorized users.

Derry Armstrong recommends an inventory of other heavy-use areas in the Bighorn Backcountry be completed. Those areas include Elk Creek, Peppers Lake, Wildhorse Creek and Eagle Lake. It was recommended to include these areas in the inventory document to identify priorities and projects for future funding. It was asked if the community can be infused to complete the trail inventory, with caution that specific protocols are required to ensure consistency. "Linear disturbance" is not necessarily considered to be a trail and some trails are suitable for frozen ground conditions but not for summer travel. The Northeast Mapping Project will include designated and managed non-motorized and motorized trails in the area from Highway 11 and north.

Due to budget constraints, this will be Derry's final meeting with the committee. Staff will continue with the trail inventory and user groups may have to contribute to with facility assistance and signs.

Thanks to Clarence Stewart for submission to the Shell Canada Tay River Environmental Enhancement (TREE) Fund and the Shell Canada / Suncor Energy, Inc. Panther River Environmental Enhancement (PREE) Fund.

TREE

Cutoff Creek Forest Recreation Area: \$27,150 for campground improvements

Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area: \$9975 for highlines

PREE

Eagle Creek Forest Recreation Area: \$9975 for highlines

Red Deer River / Panther Area application: \$15,000 for trail improvements

It was suggested that a new application be sent to TREE for funding to be put towards projects pre-approved by the monitoring committees and items discussed at this meeting. Friends of the Eastern Slopes completed the Bighorn Campground work-bee in May.

Volunteer / Stewardship Agreement

Direct donations of assets to the crown (i.e. infrastructure) are coming under increasing scrutiny. As a check and balance against the potential of political influencing associated with donations, Government of Alberta policy requires ministries to withdraw the equivalent value of any direct donation to the crown from their program budget.

As a means to enable and strengthen the role of partnerships in the delivery of safe, sustainable recreation experiences on public land, the Department is drafting a Recreation Site Agreement. This agreement would allow for ownership, maintenance and placement of recreation improvements over a specified term by a partnering organization. Liability associated with the individual improvements would remain with the owner. Ownership of trail and trail-bed would remain with the crown. This concept has been introduced for consideration in the Crowsnest area with enthusiastic interest. This concept may open additional delivery options in the Bighorn Backcountry.

Bighorn Backcountry 2009 Brochure, Website, Kiosks and Trade Show

The 2009 Bighorn Backcountry brochure was released for the May long-weekend.

The kiosk will be updated internally to reflect the new 2009 brochure. The entire Bighorn Backcountry website will be revised as a Department initiative. The Bighorn Backcountry booth was present in June at the Safety at work, Home & Play Day.

Open Floor

The Bighorn Backcountry Field Day at the Eagle Lake / Ya Ha Tinda area will be August 6, 2009

The next standing committee meeting will be October 29, 2009.

The annual Alberta Trappers Association Convention will be July 3 and 4, 2009 at the Sundre Arena and Sundre and District Curling Club. The public is welcome to attend.

It was asked if there is a better staging for the Whitegoat Trail. The Cline Waste Transfer Site is not clean, requires repair and garbage is outside the dump area. The borrow pit in the general area has other large debris items.

It is requested to put signs indicating no overnight camping in the area near the West Nordegg Trout Pond. Considerable garbage remains and overnight camping monopolizes the areas from other day users.

Ya Ha Tinda and Hummingbird areas are designated STARS landing sites with the signs completed and paid by Friends of the Eastern Slopes. There is an additional STARS landing site in the Cutoff Creek area, registered to Sundre Forest Products. If an additional landing site is required the Department will be required to apply for this site.

At the South Ram Lookout area, it is recommended a larger area be closed to overnight camping due to wildlife. This will be a day use only area. The standing committee recommends this larger area be for only day use.

The Grand Prairie ATV and Truck Show is this weekend.

Derry Armstrong thanks all members as this will be his final meeting. It has been a pleasure for Derry to work with the steering and standing committees.