

Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan

Monitoring: Standing Committee

October 17, 2006

Rocky Mountain House West Central High School

In Attendance

Mike Adolph	Cal Rakach	Jeff Wilson	Roger Marvin
Deb Schroderous	James Brady	Lorne Hindbo	Ken Qually
Dennis Schafer	Clarence Stewart	Nathan Ambler	Jimmy Clark
Jeff Baltzer			

Yvette Choma	Wayne Crocker	Derry Armstrong	Rob Popowich
Myles Jensen	Kevin Wirtanen	Cory Wojtowicz	

Chairperson

Don Livingston

Regrets

Loyal Ma	Bob Long	Rob Hunter	Doug Ritchie
Rick Artzen	Derek Durocher	Philip Lacerte	Harlan Dixon
Ken Schroderous	Melanie Desjarlais	Earl Graham	R.W. (Bobby) Turner
Christie Clark	Kristin McKenzie	Sandi Phillips	Steve Taylor

Introduction

Don Livingston thanked everyone for attending the meeting, with special thanks to West Central High School Principal Mr. Jimmy Clark for the opportunity to use the school meeting room.

Rob Popowich, Lands Division Manager has replaced Butch Shenfield on the steering committee. Butch thanks the members of the Bighorn Backcountry Standing and Steering Committees for their commitment over the past several years.

Kevin Wirtanen, Recreation Stewardship & Partnership Coordinator has replaced Ted Edwards on the steering committee.

Cory Wojtowicz, Compliance & Assurance Officer from Blairmore was introduced. The Ghost Forest Land Use Zone was legislated in May 2006.

Activities, Enforcement and Signing

Trail counter data from all trail counters is currently being downloaded and the trail counters being re-set for the fall season. All information will be updated on the Bighorn Backcountry website under MONITORING, COUNTER GRAPHS.

One seasonal office was hired to replace vandalized or stolen signs and install new signs. Theft of locks from gates increases during the fall, and overall sign vandalism and theft remains an issue.

The hunting season is in effect with officers enforcing in the field. Infractions include motorized vehicles traveling into forest land use zones or areas where not permitted, some being “repeat offenders.” The public has concerns that users are taking their families into areas to ride respectfully, while others are in the same area and non-compliant of the legislation. Users have a concern that they want security if non-compliant behavior occurs and do not want to experience “rowdy behavior” from other users. The Bighorn Dam area is seeing a shift of users towards more families with some correspondence indicating families feel more comfortable riding in some areas than in previous years.

The Blackstone Gap area is receiving many inquiries. The Michelle Lakes area began receiving many inquiries in 2005 possibly related to two articles in fishing magazines.

Mike Adolph is now a certified Alpine Guide for the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides (ACMG). Certified guides are required for commercial travel in Banff and Jasper National Parks.

The Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Range Lands Act (WAERNAHR) is the legislation that governs Parks & Protected Areas. This act now states that open fires are not permitted in White Goat and Siffleur Wilderness Areas. Over the years the use of a lean-to and open fire is being replaced by a tent and a camp stove. Many users also pack-out toilet paper, and some groups pack-out human waste. Parks & Protected Areas is in the process of updating brochures with new legislation.

During Fire #99 in Nordegg a dozer guard was constructed to contain the fire. This guard was recently reclaimed to a walking trail. This trail leads to high elevation with a view that may become a destination spot. A sign with pictures of the 1913 and 2006 fires on the same mountain will be installed at the trailhead.

The R11 Forest Management Plan has planned a prescribed burn along Highway 11 between Highway 93 and Whirlpool Point. This prescribed burn is planned in conjunction with Parks Canada and some plant studies in specific areas will be completed. The prescribed burn is to eliminate open and mature pine trees that are a threat to Mountain Pine Beetle.

Work Projects

Wayne Crocker presented photographs of the work projects completed this past year in the Bighorn Backcountry. Many groups offered labor, funds, material and equipment to assist with several different projects in different areas. Wayne has received many phone calls from the public, in appreciation for the work completed. The work completed includes the following:

- trail re-routing;
- bridge construction;
- sign installation;
- closing of unsafe trail sections, and
- installation of geotech fabric under wet trail sections.
- hardening of trail sections;
- new trail sections/bypasses developed;
- large rocks in place to eliminate traffic;

Gravelling at the Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area will be completed with frozen ground conditions.

The county will be contacted to ensure snow removal will be completed to the Crescent Falls parking area.

Most backcountry Garden Thrones (toilets) were moved to new holes. Two new destination areas are identified for additional Garden Thrones. These toilets have been placed at destination areas, high use trails and high use intersections.

The updated Tay River Environmental Enhancement (TREE) Fund was distributed. These applications must be submitted by November 15, 2006 for the fall review period.

Cutoff Creek Forest Recreation Area Concept Plan

The draft concept plan for the Cutoff Creek Forest Recreation Area was previously submitted to the standing and steering committee members but some members were not completely satisfied. Reconsideration to the recommendations was requested. In June the recommendations were presented to commercial trail riding and guide/outfitting stakeholder groups, and other equestrian comments were forwarded to Derry Armstrong.

Based on the above, the following information was recommended:

- The access from Highway 734 was previously in poor condition. Following the summer 2006 flood Clearwater County repaired the road; however, some rough areas remain and it is recommended this road be placed on the county's inventory of roads to be maintained.
- The west Kiska/Willson Forest Land Use Zone boundary was moved to the river, making enforcement and understanding of the boundary easier for officers and users. It was also recommended the east Kiska/Willson Forest Land Use Zone boundary be moved to the east to control on-highway vehicle traffic on the north and south trails that are being used as roads. At the June meeting with stakeholder groups it was requested the boundary be moved farther to the east towards Limestone Lookout Trail. The forest management area holder is in agreement with this boundary change as it will assist in protecting roads that are developed. Their only concern if this forest land use zone would be transferred to Parks & Protected Areas.

- It is understood that changes to boundaries takes time, and the current north trail has several wet areas.
- The south trail follows an old road with connections at the north end of the lake being very rough. It was suggested small improvements would better accommodate off-highway vehicles and equestrian users, but wagons would be too wide for this trail.

The standing committee was asked if they were in support of these recommendations. These recommendations and a map will be distributed to all members in hardcopy, to enable members to contact their user groups. It was also recommended that other communities of interest be contacted, including environmentalists and on-highway vehicle users, with all documentation of changes and contacts being sent to Edmonton.

Upper Clearwater/Ram Forest Land Use Zone Trail

The summer motorized representative, on behalf of the Bighorn Heritage ATV Society brought forward a proposal to open the following trails to off-highway vehicles:

- Monument Valley Falls Trail;
- trail to Monument Valley Lookout, and
- trail to Pleasant Valley Lookout.

It was asked why this trail was not currently open to off-highway vehicles, with the reasons being wildlife issues and motorized vehicles, and water quality issues with creek crossings. There is current concern that trails opened above tree line to off-highway vehicles will have a negative effect on wildlife.

The Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan will be under review in 2007, five years after legislation. This review will include housekeeping items, monitoring plot review and “where are we now.”

It was questioned if these three new trails would draw more users. Most likely, but also because access trails have more improvements and give a better quality experience.

It was questioned the message we give if more trails are open while signs continue to be vandalized and stolen and laws continue to be broken. What does the honest person receive for obeying the law? It was asked if fines could be listed at kiosks to inform the public.

This proposal will be forwarded to all standing committee and steering committee members, with comments from users groups to be sent to Yvette Choma. The original process documents will also be reviewed.

Upper Clearwater/Ram Forest Land Use Zone Trail Planning

As the front country forest recreation area concept plans are nearly complete, efforts will be shifted to trail planning. The Upper Clearwater/Ram Forest Land Use Zone was chosen by the standing committee at the previous meeting. Concept plans for trail planning will provide long-term planning and will require a complete inventory, user statistics and monitoring plot information. There may be the opportunity to construct new trails; however, this plan will focus on current trails. Department staff in Calgary will complete parallel planning of the Panther Corners Forest Land Use Zone, with department communication between the two offices.

Upper Clearwater/Ram Forest Land Use Zone is large and with many complications. There are a large number of motorized and non-motorized trails that will require confirmation with a GPS.

It was recommended a secure website for standing and steering committee members' communications. It was understood that the members of the standing committee volunteer their time for the Bighorn Backcountry Monitoring Group and all members may not be interested in attending all meetings. Committee members requested that hard copies of trail planning information and maps be circulated so members could receive input from their user groups.

Progress on the trail planning initiative will be provided at future standing committee meetings

Adopt-A-Trail

Currently there are greater than two dozen organizations, individuals or families that have formally adopted trails or sections of trails. There has been an inquiry regarding a school group adopting trail section in conjunction with another individual, as most school groups travel during limited months. Trails can be adopted by a combination of groups or individuals, and this is currently being done with some trails and areas.

Youth Member

The standing committee youth member expressed her desire to remain on the standing committee despite her above-youth age. Each user group has both a representative and alternate member; however, the youth member user group has only a representative.

There is not a minimum age requirement for a youth member, as school outdoor education programs begin at age 14. It was recommended the Standing Committee Hiking Representative and Alternate bring forward the names of individuals who would be interested in participation. A written essay from the students was also recommended.

Bighorn Backcountry Field Day

In August the standing committee participated in a field trip to Cutoff Creek and Hummingbird Forest Recreation Areas. The field day enabled members to see the areas and concerns that had been discussed in previous meetings and outlined in concept plans.

Canadian Off-Road Expo

In September the department participated in the Canadian Off-Road Expo at the Western Park in Red Deer. Approximately 6000 people attended this trade show, and vehicle events were located inside the building due to the previous year's poor weather.

The *Respect The Land* trailer was present at the booth and many compliments were received from the general public and other government personnel. Other comments from the show included the following:

- questions regarding lights, insurance and registration for off-highway vehicles;
- questions where users are able to ride, particularly with families;
- "5% of the rowdy users ruin it for the 95% of the compliant users," and
- many people were new to the general area or new to the province.

Upcoming shows include the Edmonton and Calgary shows. The 2007 shows include the Canadian Off-Road Expo and Sportsman Show at the Western Park.

Miscellaneous

The Bighorn Backcountry brochure will be re-printed the beginning of 2007.

The following recommendations were brought forward for the re-print

- major trail intersections and major areas could be numbered with an appropriate sign in the field;
- updated GPS information of trails and roads will be printed;
- North Ram River Provincial Recreation Area was reclaimed in June 2006;
- lighten the colour of the water features, and
- could detailed 1:50,000 maps be printed on 8.5" x 11" paper and available for specific areas on-site or at kiosks.

The *Respect The Land* Program will be made more visible through stewardship messages and education. These messages and the *Respect The Land* trailer will be presented at upcoming provincial trade shows. The public needs to understand what they are permitted in specific areas prior to arriving in the area.

The Ghost Stewardship Committee is in the formation process and has inquired the functions of the Bighorn backcountry committees. There may be some cross-referencing between the two committees for common processes and actions.

The Forty-Mile Trail near the first creek crossing may require some work due to the 2007 flooding.

It was asked if there is a penalty if a user ties a horse to a tree. If there is a sign in place, there is a penalty if a horse is tied to a tree. Currently, this penalty amount is being amended.

The next meeting will be February 6th at 9:00 AM.