

Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan

Monitoring: Standing Committee

November 5, 2008

Rocky Mountain House Super 8 Motel

In Attendance

Jeff Wilson	Ken Qually	Roger Marvin	Bob Long
Clarence Stewart	Kevin Gagne	Paul Radchenko	Neil Godlonton
Justin Ellis	Yvette Choma	Derry Armstrong	Chiara Feder
Robin McDonald	Loyal Ma	Tony Snow	Bill Snow
Doug Ritchie	Brent Young	Dennis Schafer	Lorne Hindbo
Gord Sanders	Wayne Crocker	Curtis Nichol	Elder Rock Abraham

Chairperson

Don Livingston

Regrets

Rob Hunter	Bernie Schmitte	Cory Wojtowicz	Marvin Abraham
Jeff Baltzer	Phil Lacerte	Dick Wymenga	R.W. (Bobby) Turner
Christie Clark	Cal Rakach	Myles Jensen	Mike Adolph
Kristin McKenzie	Steve Taylor	Sandi Phillips	Rick Artzen
John Evans	Derek Durocher	Rob Popowich	James Brady

Introduction

Don Livingston thanks everyone for attending the meeting.

- Bighorn Backcountry Standing Committee Trapping Representative Gord Sanders and Alternate Neil Godlonton are welcomed to the committee.
- Tony Snow and Bill Snow from the Wesley First Nation are welcomed to the meeting.
- Parks and Protected Areas Curtis Nichol is replacing Myles Jensen for this meeting.
- Tourism Development Planner Paul Radchenko has joined the steering committee, replacing Sean Moore.

Round table introductions are completed.

Activities, Enforcement and Signing

The summer was busy, with wet ground conditions. Due to these wet conditions and the volunteer efforts to maintain the trail network, the Bighorn Dam Area was closed to off-highway vehicles during the spring period. This situation was generally well received by these users, as most riders understood the reasons for the closure and that it was requested by the Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association. A recent U-Tube video on the internet of the Joyce Creek area identified users and their non-compliant off-highway vehicle use. These identified individuals have been contacted.

Signs continue to be vandalized, with some areas being repeat targets. Due to the large number of trails and linear disturbance not suitable for off-highway vehicles in the Kiska/Willson Forest Land Use Zone, it is recommended that all trails will be closed unless signed that they are open for use. Blow-out maps at kiosk locations will also better-able users to travel on designated trails. Other department's and umbrella organization's hard-line messaging and advertising has been reviewed and compared with Lands Division's softer messaging. New hard-line signage would show pictures and appear as:

_____ + _____ = ***AREA CLOSED TO MOTORIZED VEHICLES.***

In the Ghost Forest Land Use Zone, the digital designated trail system is being tested for availability to the public. This would enable the public to download the designated trail system to any Global Positioning System and assist the user with trail navigation. This tool and the current map will help the public use the designated trail.

The Coliseum Trail Staging Area and new bypass trail are complete. The new trail was completed by volunteers, to bypass private residential land. The staging area has been graveled but will be expanded due to the unanticipated high number of vehicles using the staging area. The trail and staging area receive considerable traffic from school groups and individuals in the area for a day visit.

Considerable volunteer work was completed in other areas, and predominantly in the Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area. Photographs of the volunteers working are circulated to the committee members.

On the Bighorn Backcountry map in the Kiska/Willson Forest Land Use Zone, there are many yellow lines that do not truly represent the ground features and suitable trails. It is difficult for users to navigate, and some yellow lines take users to a dead end or to areas where they are not be permitted (eg)into a Parks & Protect Area.

Trappers use trails that are permitted for off-highway vehicle trapline use but are not for use by the general public. The committee's trapping representative and alternate have ordered signs that will be available for trappers to purchase and install on the appropriate trails. The Scalp Creek Trail was questioned, as this trail is a permit-only trail for snow vehicle use.

Bighorn Dam / Crescent Falls / Nordegg Area Trail Inventories Report

Clearwater County has a proposal for the re-development of the rail line into a trail, from Nordegg to Rocky Mountain House. This trail will funnel considerable traffic into the Bighorn Backcountry. Members interested in this trail project can contact Derry Armstrong for additional information.

The Bighorn Backcountry's forest recreation areas were previously assessed with a concept plan of recommendations for each area. The Bighorn Backcountry Planning Implementation Progress document is distributed to the committee members, to outline the work completed and the work to be completed. The committee should be very pleased with the projects that have been accomplished and the positive contributions towards the forest recreation areas. Near the Cutoff Creek Forest Recreation Area, the west forest land use boundary was moved west towards the river, but the east boundary awaits approval to be moved more to the east.

In 2007 an inventory of trails in the Upper Clearwater/Ram Forest Land Use Zone was completed. At the previous committee meetings, the trail plan was presented and editorial comments were received from the members. The revised plan will be mailed to the committee members.

In regards to the trails in the Upper Clearwater/Ram Forest Land Use Zone:

- The Hummingbird by-pass trail was completed and the trail was moved to higher and drier ground;
- substantial work is required in the day-use equestrian trails leading from the Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area;
- trail repair was completed near Onion Lake, addressing wet areas;
- trails that were not inventoried in 2007 have been completed in 2008;
- the wagon trail near the Clearwater River has been inventoried and trail requirements will be addressed, and
- climbing, cycling and hiking trails require a focus.

In the Kiska/Willson Forest Land Use Zone, the large area was broken into smaller areas with the primary focus of the trails being the following areas:

- Bighorn Dam area;
- Nordegg Area;
- Crescent Falls area, and
- Tershishner Creek area.

The Bighorn Dam Area is a quality trail with good signs, a large staging area and a good model for the committee to use for other areas. In the Crescent Falls and Nordegg areas, a similar model can be developed. The greatest task in these areas will be getting the required work completed.

It is asked if there is considerable off-highway vehicle traffic from the trails onto the Big Horn Reserve. There is some off-highway vehicle traffic including more dirt bike traffic. The comment is that the larger question is the strategy, policies and guidelines and working on the same level of understanding between the First Nations and the department. The only person to have input or to approve or disapprove responses to a project is the chief in council. The department will meet with the appropriate Wesley First Nations to discuss previous First Nations representation and information. Other provincial landuse planning will involve regional plans with a regional direction.

Five Year Review

The Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan Implementation Review Terms of Reference is distributed to the committee members. The members are asked to forward comments to Yvette Choma by December 15, 2008. These comments will be forwarded to Rob Popwich. The timelines indicated in the document are a guideline and are flexible.

Bighorn Dam Area

Don has met with department legal staff and representatives from TransAlta regarding the Bighorn Dam area and the high number of users and infrastructure. The following points were brought forward:

- The adopted trail is in far better condition with more riders, compared to previous years of being an unmaintained trail with fewer riders.
- Due to wet spring conditions, a temporary off-highway vehicles closure was established. Is this an area that should have a permanent timing closure, similar to trails in the Hummingbird area? Some committee members agree, as this will enable the ground to sufficiently dry and also accommodate any wildlife calving and movement. Displaced traffic will require addressing.
- Trails in this area are located in TransAlta's Water Development Licence. A strategy is required so trails are not destroyed, resulting in public access being denied.
- TransAlta has concerns with erosion, vehicles driving over instruments, human waste and garbage remaining from users. There is also concern of potential on-highway vehicle traffic over the dam should an off-highway vehicle gate be installed to permit wider side-by-side units.
- The department has discussed the possibility of a forest recreation area and the establishment of toilets, designated trails, designated staging and camping areas.

It is recommended a brochure for the area that defines off-trail use, statement of risk, photographs, hard-line messaging, First Nations history and responsible rider and trail use.

It is asked if funding is available for blended partnership enforcement, including volunteers, corporations and governments. A similar and successful model is used in the Moab, Utah area. It is asked if there should be a type of user poll in the immediate area. Current traffic counters, equestrian commercial permits and enforcement patrols are an indication of some user numbers; however, other commercial operator's numbers and other recreation numbers are not known.

Provincial Recreation Enforcement Task Group

Deputy Minister Eric McGhan has tasked Clearwater Area Manager Bruce Cartwright to lead a provincial enforcement group. The interagency actions of the Clearwater Area will become a provincial initiative. Currently the department works with other municipal, provincial and federal government agencies, volunteers and other organizations on front country, backcountry and river patrols. Additional partnerships and contacts can be forwarded to Don.

Other department's and umbrella organization's hard-line messaging and advertising has been reviewed and compared with Lands Division's softer messaging. New hard-line messaging will be developed. This messaging is part of an educational approach that will define the government expectations and what is acceptable on public land. Enculturation will take a long time and the issues require current addressing.

Recreation Tour

Rita Stagman is planning a Bighorn Backcountry Recreation Tour on May 26, 2009. This bus tour will be open to members of this committee, government departments, the counties, Town of Rocky Mountain House, chambers of commerce, visitor centres and area school teachers. This tour will address the following:

- interactions of government department;
- different recreation and commercial user groups and traffic volume;
- stewardship;
- fish and wildlife issues, and
- industry.

For general inquiries regarding this bus tour or members wishing to participate, please contact Rita.

Open Floor

The Bighorn Backcountry brochure will be re-printed in 2009 and available for distribution in May. The map will be updated to reflect the new information based on field inventories. Additional blow-out maps will be added, and these blow-out maps will be available at the appropriate staging area kiosk. Please send any brochure recommendations to Yvette.

The volunteer agreement is complete and will be released this winter in time for spring maintenance. Insurance will be required for volunteer groups or organizations, but volunteer individuals will be covered under department insurance. For additional insurance, the Alberta TrailNet (1-877-987-2457) can be contacted. Specific training (eg)chainsaw use, will be required and available courses taught by the department.

The R11 Forest Management Plan is established to return the ecosystem processes back to a more natural stage. Several prescribed burns and FireSmart projects are planned for the Bighorn Backcountry area. Unfortunately, this year's wet and cooler weather did not assist the potential of the prescribed burns. It is questioned if FireSmart is being considered for high risk and high use areas including forest recreation areas. FireSmart projects were planned with members of the Big Horn Reserve. Trappers ask for additional wildlife research information that can be taken to the trapping community.

In previous years, Mountain Pine Beetle baits were placed in every township within the Clearwater Area. Along Highway 11, some baited trees were attacked by a low beetle population in 2008. These trees were burned with a few control trees to remain for study in 2009. Provincially, areas to the north around Grand Prairie received some good winter kill due but still maintain some pockets of surviving populations, and the Slave Lake area continues to be controlled.

Friends of the Eastern Slopes presents a cheque of \$2500 to the Bighorn Heritage AVT Society to assist with trail maintenance. Partnerships between different volunteer organizations and the different municipal and provincial government agencies have resulted in great achievements, and every contribution helps to achieve more. A 2008 Campground Improvements and Maintenance summary is distributed. This will be posted on the Bighorn Backcountry website with the summary notes from this meeting.

The Tay River Environmental Enhancement Fund (TREE) from Shell Canada is coming to a close. In the past, this fund has assisted with the purchase of wildlife collars, and funds for prescribed burning, trail maintenance and moving of a cattle shelter from a river. It is recommended the Bighorn Backcountry Standing Committee recommend a project in the Baseline area that can benefit from the remaining funds. Members can contact Lorne Hindbo and Loyal Ma for further information.

EnCana Corp. has expressed interest to obtain information regarding volunteer – industry partnerships in the Bighorn Backcountry. For further information regarding this opportunity, committee members can contact Rita Stagman.

There is concern with frequent helicopter traffic and associated garbage in the Landslide Lake area, expressed by recreation users to a committee member. It is asked at what point is there limit set to the number of visitors to the backcountry lakes and alpine areas. The social and environmental impact to the landscape needs to be addressed. Federal agencies monitor the actual airspace and the provincial agency monitors the landing of a helicopter of public lands. It is asked if this is an opportunity to “partner” with the commercial helicopter company, and selected committee members will address these traffic concerns with the operator.

It is asked if this committee can meet with the members of the Land Use Framework. Don will address this concern.

STARS landing sites have been discussed with Clearwater County and STARS. Don will follow up with the progress of these identified sites and any further requirements.

The next meeting will be March 4, 2009 at the Rocky Mountain House Super 8 Motel.