

Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan

Monitoring: Standing Committee

March 4, 2009

Rocky Mountain House Super 8 Motel

In Attendance

Ken Qually	Roger Marvin	Bernie Schmitte	Maria Sharpe
Clarence Stewart	Kevin Gagne	Paul Radchenko	Shevenell Webb
Justin Ellis	Yvette Choma	Derry Armstrong	Chiara Feder
Phil Lacerte	Dick Wymenga	Cal Rakach	Myles Jensen
Rick Artzen	Doug Ritchie	Dennis Schafer	Lorne Hindbo
Gord Sanders	Rita Stagman	Don McLaughlin	

Chairperson

Wayne Crocker

Regrets

Rob Hunter	Cory Wojtowicz	Marvin Abraham	Jeff Baltzer
Christie Clark	Mike Adolph	Kristin McKenzie	Steve Taylor
Sandi Phillips	John Evans	Derek Durocher	R.W. (Bobby) Turner
James Brady	Jeff Wilson	Bob Long	Loyal Ma
Robin McDonald	Brent Young	Don Livingston	Elder Rock Abraham
Neil Godlonton			

Introduction

Wayne Crocker thanked everyone for attending the meeting. Round table introductions were completed. A get-well card for one of the standing committee members was circulated.

Activities, Enforcement and Signing

Wayne thanked Trapper Representative Gord Sanders and Alternate Neil Godlonton for having signs produced and located on trapping trails. Since the sign installation on trapping trails, there has been very good compliance and the public understands these trails are not the designated trails.

The winter has been a quiet year for enforcement issues. A few issues resulted in the area of the Ya Ha Tinda where ice climbers were driving through the ranch into Parks Canada area. The access was on a Public Lands seasonal logging road.

Kiska/Willson Trail Inventory

Last year the trail inventory was completed for the Upper Clearwater/Ram Forest Land Use Zone. This year the focus was the Kiska/Willson Forest Land Use Zone and particular areas of frequent use. A report will be generated for the members and available at the next meeting. This report will identify the trails in the areas of Tershishner Creek, Nordegg and the Bighorn Dam. The trail inventory contains information regarding the trail location, width, terrain, steepness, type of condition, and any concerns or opportunities. Future decisions will be made regarding these trails. There is concern regarding the work to be completed, the lack of funding, and limited number of volunteers.

Tershishner Creek and Crescent Falls Area

- some trails lead into the Crescent Falls Provincial Recreation Area;
- some trails are old seismic lines which travel through wet areas;
- opportunities for good trail activity exist;
- the focus is towards off-highway vehicle activities, and
- there is some equestrian use but development is required.

Nordegg Area

- the rails to trails development will bring considerable future traffic into the Nordegg area;
- considerable opportunity exists south of Nordegg on old industry roads located on high areas with great views;
- some areas south of Nordegg have inappropriate areas for travel, and
- the terrain is different on the north side of Nordegg, and includes the non-motorized Coliseum Trail and the trail to Baldy Mountain Fire Lookout.

Bighorn Dam Area

- the trails are in very good condition thanks to the efforts of volunteers;
- considerable work completed on the trail includes additional signage, detours, raised trail sections, boardwalk and re-routing, and
- this trail network is a good model that indicates users will travel on a good quality trail.

Currently the Bighorn Backcountry map does not accurately indicate the appropriate trails. Some trails lead to a dead end or into areas where off-highway vehicle use is not permitted including Parks and Protected Areas. Some trails could be developed in the future to create a loop trail. Trail markers are a way to guide people along the designated trail.

In the Nordegg area there is considerable off-highway vehicle and non-motorized users on the same trail. Some trails that were originally constructed for single-track use are now being used by off-highway vehicles. Safety is a concern despite the fact that some trails may have been intended for multi-use. The following suggestions were brought forward:

- specific trails could be designated for non-motorized use;
- specific trails could have timing restrictions for motorized use, and
- a random sledding area could be designated for snow vehicle use, with consideration to wildlife.

Nordegg is a destination stop and jump-off area with many users. There is sufficient area that that could be developed into individual trails for different users, and quality trails that most visitors would frequent. Education and signage are required, including areas that lead to private land in the Nordegg North Subdivision. It was asked if Clearwater County has a trail plan for Nordegg. Enforcement in the Nordegg's North Subdivision, Townsite and Industrial Subdivision is the responsibility of the county.

The committee members are asked to consult their groups regarding the following:

- (1) removing from the Bighorn Backcountry map the motorized trails that lead to dead-end and wet areas, and trails that lead to areas where motorized use is not permitted;
- (2) developing a random sledding area in the Nordegg area, and
- (3) discussing concerns of single track and single user trails in the Nordegg area.

Members are asked to contact Wayne regarding any concerns or suggestions.

Five-Year Review

All standing and steering committee members were mailed the Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan Five Year Review Progress Questionnaire. Derry Armstrong will complete a summary of the responses, and report back to the committees at the next meeting. The individuals' identities will remain confidential in this summary. This summary will be given to the Department for consideration.

Prescribed Burning

Bernie Schmitte gave a presentation on the R11 Forest Management Plan and the prescribed burning in the Clearwater Area.

- The R11 Forest Management Plan was developed to:
 - reduce the threat of large-scale, catastrophic fire
 - improve habitat for grizzly bear and elk populations
 - return the forest age class distributions to the historic range.
- The R11 Forest Management Plan involves both prescribed burning and, where currently accessible, mechanical logging.
- Several prescribed burns will take place over several years in a variety of areas for the purpose of wildlife habitat, Mountain Pine Beetle, and capping units which prevent a forest fire from excessively spreading. These prescribed burns are conducted with fire fighters on the ground and helicopters.
- In 2007, the following prescribed burns were conducted:
 - Blackstone capping unit (127.5 hectares)
 - Ya Ha Tinda (150 hectares)
 - Upper Saskatchewan (63 hectares).
- In 2008, the following prescribed burns were conducted:
 - South Idlewilde
 - Upper Clearwater
 - Upper Saskatchewan Unit 1.
- Future prescribed burns include the Chungo, Wapiabi, Hummingbird, Upper Clearwater, Ya Ha Tinda, Upper Saskatchewan and South Idlewilde Units. Prescribed burns will occur over several years in the same unit.

- Prescribed burns are conducted in the spring or the fall, depending on many environmental factors. Trails and areas are closed and signed for the safety of the public. Considerable stakeholder and public consultation is completed.

For specific information and maps regarding the upcoming prescribed burns, please contact Bernie in Rocky Mountain House.

Volunteer Agreement

The volunteer agreement has been completed. Changes to the current process include volunteer safety (worker's compensation), volunteer liability insurance, and the authorization process to complete work on Public Lands.

Regarding liability, volunteers will be treated as employees and must have Occupational Health & Safety training when using chainsaws, off-highway vehicles and equipment. Clarification is required regarding specific liability questions. An inventory will be completed of organizations, their current liability, and members' certifications. It is not certain the time that will be required for projects to be approved. The Department will offer volunteers chainsaw and off-highway vehicle training.

Gifts and donations to Public Lands are being questioned. These items include toilets and bridges that are constructed by volunteers and become property of the Alberta Government. It is recommended that project work and infrastructure items be separated when volunteers are submitting projects for approval. Volunteers will continue to contact Wayne to discuss future projects.

Parks and Protected Areas has many volunteers who complete work for their Department. An annual meeting is conducted in the spring and projects are approved from the local office.

Bighorn Dam Area

During the past two years, spring closures have been placed on the trails due to wet ground conditions. These requests were brought forward to the Department by the Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association to assist trail stewards and trail maintenance efforts. It was asked if this area should have trail timing restrictions similar to trail in other areas. The following comments were brought forward:

- March 15 to June 1 is a time period when ground conditions are very susceptible to off-highway vehicle traffic. It was questioned if March 15 would be too soon for a closure date for off-highway vehicles.
- Other trails with off-highway vehicle timing restrictions do not permit off-highway vehicle traffic between March 16 and June 30. Snow vehicles are permitted until April 30 as they are self-regulating due to the snow availability.
- Enforcement is easier if trail timing restrictions for all trails in the same area are the same dates. There is less confusion for the users.
- It was asked if, during an appropriate dry season, the trails would be open earlier than July 1 and how this would be communicated to the public. Communication would be through signage, the Bighorn Backcountry website, contact with the Department in the office and in the field, and office notices.

- Any adjustments to the Hummingbird area would be directed to the steering committee members, with consideration to wildlife.
- Members will take the following recommendation to their organizations and report back to the steering committee: trail network open for off-highway vehicles July 1 to March 15, with the possibility of early opening during dry ground conditions.

Landslide Lake Interpretative Trail

Forestry Division is proposing an interpretative trail beginning at the Landslide Lake Staging Area. This trail would be constructed after the completion of the prescribed burn. The objectives are to educate the public on the following:

- (1) natural disturbance history;
- (2) fire ecology, and
- (3) R11 Forest Management Plan.

The trail would be a small portion of the current Landslide Lake Trail located close to Highway 11. The trail, staging area and many points of interest currently exist. Additional signage and toilet facilities will require development. Over time, stations on the trail will shift as the landscape changes.

The proposed timeline includes the following:

- 2008 to 2009: background research, the proposal, the prescribed burn
- 2009 to 2010: develop and order signage, and
- 2010 to 2011: install signs, open trail to the public, evaluate the project.

For further information regarding this trail or a potential to partner with this project, contact Maria Sharpe or Shevenell Webb in Rocky Mountain House.

BearSmart

The provincial *BearSmart* program began in 2005. The main objective is to increase education and minimize the possibility of bear-human conflict. By minimizing the bear-human conflict, the number of bear relocations and destructions will also decrease. Implementation of the *BearSmart* program goes into the community.

As bears require considerable food sources, conflicts may occur with recreation users who leave behind food and wildlife carcasses. Residential areas in bear populations may also contribute to conflict. The solution includes:

- prevention;
- information to residents and recreationist, and
- implementation of strategies.

In Mountainview County, community volunteers are assisting the department by distributing *BearSmart* information to the residents and recreationists. Chiara Feder is seeking committee members to assist with the same program in the Bighorn Backcountry. Assistance includes providing information to recreationist with ways to minimize human-bear conflict. There is also the possibility to implement public education and to action strategies including bear-proof portable containers and portable electric fences.

Bear Awareness week is April 20 to 25, followed by the May long-weekend. To assist Chiara with the BearSmart program, contact her at the Rocky Mountain House office.

Bighorn Backcountry Miscellaneous

The Department participated in the recent Red Deer Sportsman Show. Attendance at the show was estimated to be slightly higher than the 2008 show. The next local shows include Safety at Work, Home in Play in June at Rocky Mountain House, and the Canadian Off-Road Expo in September at the Red Deer Westerner Park.

The Bighorn Backcountry brochure will be re-printed this spring and available prior to the May long weekend. Several updates include the following:

- equestrian information including designated highlines and manure disposal sites;
- bear and wildlife information;
- new blowout maps for the Tershishner and Nordegg areas, with all blowout maps to be an image background;
- off-highway vehicle information to reflect current issues including designated creek and bridge crossings, and requirements for riding on Public Lands, and
- maps to be updated with current information gathered from trail inventories.

The members were asked if the off-highway vehicle trails should be reflective of the trail inventory information. It was agreed that these users should be presented a map that indicates appropriate areas and trails for travel, not dead-end trails or trails that lead to Parks and Protected Areas or areas where non-motorized travel is not permitted.

Open Floor

The Shell/Mancal TREE fund has \$100,000 remaining for field project use. There may be projects within the Bighorn Backcountry that can benefit from this funding. It was asked if the Cutoff Creek and Hummingbird areas could benefit from this funding. The deadline for commitment to the funds is April 30, 2009. There is also federal funding available for projects, and this information will be forward to the members.

There will be six forest guardians in the Clearwater Area in 2009.

In the South Ram Lookout area, the standing committee previously recommended this would be a day use area. The Department will work on this objective.

It was asked if the Land Use Framework would supersede the recommendations and decisions of the Bighorn Backcountry committees. The Land Use Framework will develop regional plans for the province to provide direction for all industrial and recreational land use. These regional plans become legislation and can supersede any existing plans.

The next meeting will be scheduled for June 11, 2009.

After the meeting it was asked if the random sledding areas and appropriate trails closure dates could be extended to June 30 from April 30. This would permit snow vehicle use during years of heavy spring snowfall. This will be brought forward at the next meeting.

