

Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan

Monitoring: Standing Committee

October 21, 2010 (Revised)

Rocky Mountain House Super 8 Motel

In Attendance

Phil Lacerte	Dick Wymenga	Clarence Stewart	Bob Long
Roger Marvin	Ken Qually	Kevin Gagne	Lorne Hindbo
Laura Raivio	Les Forsyth	Rita Stagman	Dennis Schafer
Rob Popowich	Yvette Choma	Gord Sanders	Neil Godlonton
Don Rilling	Lonnie Earl	James Brady	

Conference Call

David Campbell

Chairperson

Don Livingston

Regrets

Rick Artzen	Brent Young	Marvin Abraham	Doug Ritchie
Elder Rock Abraham	Mike Adolph	Kristin McKenzie	John Evans
Wayne Crocker	Loren Winnick	Bernie Schmitte	Myles Jensen
Chiara Feder	Kevin Wirtanen	Paul Radchenko	Bernie Schmitte
Cal Rakach	Sandi Phillips	Loyal Ma	Rob Hunter
Bobby Turner	Jeff Willson	Steve Taylor	Derek Durocher
Rob Unkauf			

Introduction

Don Livingston thanked everyone for attending the meeting. Round-table introductions were completed.

On the standing committee, Don Rilling will replace Christie Clark as Fixed Commercial Alternate. Rob Unkauf will replace Jeff Baltzer as Hiking Alternate. Laura Raivio will eventually replace Yvette Choma at the meetings, upon Yvette's resignation.

Activities, Enforcement and Signing

Overall, the summer was busy despite the wet conditions. The program is quite limited with funding and staff, and volunteers stepped in to assist with projects.

The trail network at the Bighorn Dam area remained dry and compact despite the overall wet conditions. Don Livingston will contact TransAlta regarding the installation of the gate that will permit off-highway vehicle access to the trail network.

Work was completed at Eagle Creek, Cutoff Creek and Hummingbird Forest Recreation Areas. Volunteers worked with Department staff to complete signage installation. Friends of the Eastern Slopes Association gave an annual financial and project summary. Users complimented the maintenance and toilet facilities in the Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area. Hay and manure remaining beneath the highlines at the Hummingbird and Eagle Creek Forest Recreation Areas continues to be a problem and these highline areas may require additional work next year. Equestrian users continue to tie horses to trees; Department staff visit these sites to speak with and educate users about using the existing highlines, and to also write tickets for non-compliance. It was asked if there would be better and more central areas for manure disposal sites to encourage more use. At the Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area, refurbished toilet facilities and tanks could be installed and later maintained with the existing toilet facilities.

In the Benchcamp area, signs are posted to indicate day use only. This year, there have been no complaints from commercial operators regarding overnight camping in this area.

Trail counters were downloaded and new batteries installed for autumn and winter. Based on these counters, more compliance is generally noticed within the forest land use zones. With the summer rain, many non-designated trails had considerable vegetative growth and this better indicated the designated trails. In the Terishshner area, arrows and additional signing are assisting users on designated trails.

During the winter, there will be two enforcement staff plus some assistance from an additional staff member.

Alberta TrailNet is working on the next mapping project which is from Highway 11 and south. The information being gathered will be directed toward the Bighorn Backcountry trail work. Members are asked to give Don new trail information for this map.

TransAlta

The standing and steering committees met in August for a field day at the Bighorn Dam. Don will be meeting with TransAlta the end of October.

The area has existing sustainable trails but not sustainable camping. TransAlta has installed signing to close trails in areas where dam infrastructure exists, with the possibility of a future brochure for users in the area. Staff members are no longer working in the area and the operations are now automated. TransAlta is interested in the potential for a designated camping area which may be a government, country or private operation. There is concern that by providing a better camping experience more off-highway vehicles will use the volunteer-maintained trails. It was suggested that a portion of a proposed camping levy or a portion of the province's potential funding mechanism (Delegated Administrative Organization) could be directed to these trail stewards for maintenance. The Department, oil company and volunteers are working to remove the Licence of Occupation in this trail network area.

The Prairie Creek area may offer opportunities of existing camping areas and future sustainable trails for off-highway vehicle use. It was recommended that an existing volunteer organization could undertake future opportunities in this area.

Delegated Administrative Organization Update

With the changes in the Public Lands Act, forest land use zones now become public land use zones, with the automatic conversion of the regulations which currently exist. This act now gives the Department the ability to enforce most improper actions on all public land. It was commented that some commercial recreation operators may not be contributing sufficient maintenance to trails that are used for commercial operations when a profit is being made by the operators.

It was asked at what stage the Department is with the recreation strategy, and if a provincial body should be developed to include all recreation user types; the recreation strategy is still sitting. It may be some time before the proposed Delegated Administrative Organization would be functional should everything be approved. This organization could direct funds towards trail stewards for trail maintenance, to help alleviate the impact of existing and increasing user numbers on volunteer-maintained trails.

Several changes have recently occurred with Department personnel in Edmonton. Some positions have not been replaced and the overall number of staff is reduced.

Wapiabi Cave Closure

Wapiabi Cave was closed in July to prevent the introduction of White-Nose Syndrome that is appearing in Eastern Canadian caves and resulting in considerable bat fatality. Prior to the cave closure, local commercial recreation operators were contacted and given notice for their programming. There have not been any issues or complaints from the commercial users or the public.

A gate will be installed that will permit the movement of bats. Without a gate and with current signage, individuals entering the cave can be charged with an offence under the Forest Recreation Regulations.

Planning / Implementation Progress

A summary of the projects completed and to be completed were presented. The projects were within the forest recreation areas, trail inventories within the Kiska/Willson and Upper Clearwater/Ram Forest Land Use Zones, and Derry Armstrong's recommendations for future trail planning. Considerable work has been completed, and some projects remain on-going or to be completed, including moving of boundaries that require legislative change. With the new Public Lands Act, some changes can be made at the level of the area director and do not require legislative change.

In the Forty Mile and Lost Guide areas there is concern of the trail conditions due to equestrian use. It was questioned what are the responsibilities of the commercial equestrian users for trail maintenance. It has been previously recommended that a user fee for off-highway vehicles be expanded to include all users who use Public Lands for recreation, with funding directed towards trail maintenance. It was suggested that this committee review some specific trails and consider if the trail is in the correct location. Commercial and non-commercial equestrian users and horse days should be compared.

Open Floor

There is concern of Bighorn Sheep population near the Kidd Creek Trail and along the trail leading to the Ranger Creek Random Sledding Area. It was asked if winter and summer population monitoring could be completed in these areas and if there are alternate routes for these two trails. The Ranger Creek Random Sledding area is an area good for family riding.

Trappers will be installing trapper-access trail signs. These signs are professional in appearance and result in good compliance from other users in the area. Very few signs are lost or vandalized.

Friends of the Eastern Slopes found that consistency in messaging and education to users works when there is change being brought forward. This was experienced with the Bighorn Campground.

A Temporary Field Authority from the Department is required for special events, rallies and other organized events for off-highway vehicle use.

It was appreciated that seasonal staff are making backcountry patrols. Most users are pleased to see Department presence in the backcountry. With minimal seasonal staff, the Department partnered with Parks and Protected Areas staff in Nordegg and the RCMP. This autumn, the department assisted the RCMP with two searches. With the funding cuts to the seasonal staff program it was asked if and suggested that letters from individuals or organizations to the Government of Alberta could assist the Department and the program funding.

Thank you to Ken Qually for his generous time and contribution to the Bighorn Backcountry Standing Committee and the projects completed.

It was asked if organizers for endurance riding competitions have approached the Department. There is concern of impact on the landscape, maintenance to the landscape that would be completed by volunteers and safety of the public. A Temporary Field Authority would be required for an event of this type.

The next meeting will be held on February 3/2011 at 9:00A.M.

Wet Area Mapping and Trail Route Modeling

David Campbell was introduced and gave a presentation to the members. David is a student in the Masters of Science program at the University of New Brunswick and signed on with the Alberta Wet-Area Initiative to research Wet Area Mapping applications in recreation and soil disturbance. He is currently working on tools to improve the identification of risks pertaining to trail network development as related to soil-vehicle relationships, Wet Area Mapping and user preference.

The general question asked is what makes a good trail, and this answer changes between users who have different perceptions. Water is probably the biggest risk on the landscape for trail operations, and knowing the location of water is important and reduces surprises. Wet Area Mapping predicts the location of water relative to the surface and can provide a means to reducing these surprises. Wet Area mapping only requires an elevation surface to predict water, the more accurate the elevation surface the more accurate Wet Area Mapping will be. Light Detection Ranging (LiDAR)-derived elevational maps utilize aircraft-mounted lasers to record elevation measurements and provide one metre resolution digital representation of the earth's topography. Alberta is the only province pursuing this version of elevation modeling, and with it many other sectors in the province will see benefits. LiDAR is Alberta's edge in pursuing sustainability goals on the landscape.

The goal of David's thesis is to use Wet Area Mapping and LiDAR to assist with trail development in the Ghost Forest Land Use Zone. Incorporating these and other sources of information into a tool to reduce risks involved with trail network development will assist Alberta sustainability goals. This tool will allow the comparison of different trail options and the best trail to be chosen with:

- improved water feature recognition during planning
- identification of areas most needing remediation
- designed "smart" trail networks that avoid risks.

It was asked what would be required for this tool to be used in areas outside the Ghost Forest Land Use Zone. The members commented that this would be an advantageous tool for planning, prior to working on the landscape. It was asked if this tool could be used by volunteer groups or individuals outside the Department.