

Bighorn Backcountry

Access Management Plan

Monitoring: Standing Committee

Meeting Summary

May 31, 2005

Rocky Mountain House Super 8 Motel

In Attendance

| | | | |
|----------------|------------------|------------------|--------------|
| Sandi Phillips | Calvin Rakach | Deb Schroderous | James Brady |
| Roger Marvin | Lorne Hindbo | Kristin McKenzie | Bob Long |
| Dennis Schafer | Clarence Stewart | Loyal Ma | Jeff Baltzer |
| Robin McDonald | Jeff Wilson | Ken Qally | |
| Yvette Choma | Derry Armstrong | Wayne Crocker | James Allen |
| Myles Jensen | Don Livingston | | |

Chairperson

Butch Shenfield

Regrets

| | | | |
|----------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Rob Hunter | Doug Ritchie | Mike Adolph | Philip Lacerte |
| Rick Artzen | Ken Schroderous | Bonnie Brewer | Harlan Dixon |
| Earl Graham | R.W. (Bobby) Turner | Derek Durocher | Steve Taylor |
| Christie Clark | Gary Mandrusiak | | |

Introduction

Butch Shenfield thanked everyone for attending the meeting. Round-table introductions were completed.

Two new individuals have joined the Standing Committee:

- Sandi Phillips replacing Jack Walker as the alternate for Equestrian, and
- Jeff Baltzer, alternate for Hiking.

Activities, Enforcement and Signing

During the May long weekend the use of 24 dumpsters was donated by industry. Government staff patrolled the area talking to people and distributing garbage bags. However, many full garbage bags were not removed by the user, but instead left at the camping site for pickup. Off-highway vehicle stickers attached to vehicle cables after checks were completed worked very well. The following were completed:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|------|
| Total people checked | 7463 |
| Total off-highway vehicles checked | 2980 |
| Total 4x4 on-highway vehicles checked | 15+ |
| Total equestrian users checked | 106 |
| Total jet boats checked | 12 |
| | |
| Total written tickets | 342 |
| Total written warnings | 32 |
| Total verbal warnings | 350+ |

Walk-in gates at waste transfer sites with limited hours cannot be installed due to liability of uncontrolled access. It was questioned why the Nordegg and Cline Waste Transfer Sites are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and are not controlled access.

Signs are continually being vandalized or stolen, and some misunderstandings occur with signs and trail braiding. One backcountry guardian has been assigned to work with sign issues.

The long-term solution appears to be enforcement and education. The *Leave No Trace* program is being integrated into high school outdoor education programs to focus education towards young people. It was questioned if Sustainable Resource Development could encourage ethics information with off-highway and snow vehicle retail outlets and encourage the government to establish an off-highway vehicle helmet law and mandatory safe rider course. **ACTION:** Confirm with Clearwater County if a helmet law can be established for off-highway vehicles users in the county.

Hummingbird and Eagle Creek Forest Recreation Areas

Eagle Creek Forest Recreation Area

This forest recreation area is generally in good condition, with some new campsites required and some general repairs. Friends of the Eastern Slopes has completed the following:

- roads were graded and re-graveled;
- boulders were placed along the road sides, and
- approaches were widened.

The spreading of windrows by a dozer should be considered. Re-seeding with native seed is a possibility, and the spreading of the soil in the windrows.

Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area

This forest recreation area had the following work completed:

- road upgrading with enforceable speed limits by Clearwater County;
- toilet facilities installed by volunteer donations and work, and
- guardian cabin installed by Sustainable Resource Development.

Additional plans include new camping facilities at the west end.

In regards to a Memorandum of Understanding, a Donor Agreement for facilities (e.g.)toilet, bridge, etc. has been drafted by Sustainable Resource Development. This Donor Agreement will state that a facility would be donated to the department, the department would take ownership of the facility and become liable. Volunteers working on public land will sign a formal agreement with the department and be covered by government insurance should they become injured while working on public land. Workers must insure that all Occupational Health & Safety Regulations are fulfilled (e.g.) certified chainsaw course and personal protective equipment when operating a chainsaw. **ACTION:** Complete Memorandum of Understanding and Donor Agreements with Friends of the Eastern Slopes to allow work to continue in the Hummingbird Forest Recreation area.

Cutoff Creek, Crescent Falls and Blackstone Gap Forest Recreation Areas

In 2004 and 2005, draft concepts plans were distributed to both the Steering and Standing Committee members.

Crescent Falls Forest Recreation Area

In this forest recreation area, there are two main concerns:

- the forest recreation area is adjacent to the Crescent Falls Provincial Recreation Area (Community Development, Parks & Protected Areas), and a joint mandate is recommended, and
- Alberta Economic Development is currently working with Clearwater County on the development nodes.

It was recommended to cease for the moment the forest recreation area planning and ensure there is no conflict with the development node. **ACTION:** Contact Clearwater County regarding the current status and any progress with the Bighorn Canyon Development Node. **ACTION:** Confirm the management intent of Community Development relative to the forest recreation area staging area.

ACTION: At the next Standing Committee meeting an update of the Crescent Falls Forest Recreation Area will be discussed.

Blackstone Gap Forest Recreation Area

This forest recreation area is very lightly used due to the poor road access. It was suggested that traffic to this area will increase when the road is developed; therefore, presently identifying recreation sites will be better than future repairing of established and poor sites. Industry is currently upgrading and re-aligning the road access and it will be confirmed with industry and Clearwater County the exact road location. Consideration of fish and wildlife timing constraints on the old road should be considered, if the road is reclaimed for trail use only upon completion of the re-aligned road.

The area will be re-viewed for potential recreation sites with Clearwater County and some members of the Standing Committee.

Cutoff Creek Forest Recreation Area

At the February 2005 meeting, a draft concept plan was presented the following specific issues were highlighted:

- re-development the existing staging area;
- service facilities to be identified and provided;
- identification a future recreation area closer to the Clearwater River;
- deterioration of the north and south trails;
- boundaries of the forest management area and Kiska/Willson and Upper Clearwater/Ram Forest Land Use Zones make this a complicated forest recreation area, and
- boundaries between the forest land use zones are “invisible” and not land or water-related.

With a high water level of the Clearwater River, equestrian use is limited to the east side of the river. Off-highway vehicles are permitted in the current staging area, but not permitted west into the Upper Clearwater/Ram Forest Land Use Zone other than the Clearwater River and Skeleton Creek Trails during specific times.

Protection of the riparian habitat near the river is a concern if the forest land use zone “invisible” boundary were to be moved from the current location to the Clearwater River.

The north trail could be hardened for equestrian, wagon and off-highway vehicle use, but could be easily damaged with on-highway vehicle use.

A future camping site near the current camping site could be identified, containing a separate day use area and staging area.

The Clearwater Forest Recreational Trail Initiative and the forest management area holder will be consulted in the next phase of plan development.

Priorities for Forest Recreation Area Concept Plans

Priorities for all five forest recreation areas will be required. This will be discussed at the fall Standing Committee meeting.

Motorized Use Affecting Wildlife

Off-highway vehicle use on designated trails has resulted in rutting of snow in the late fall and early spring. During the past two years, the Clearwater River and Skeleton Creek Trails have been closed prior to April 30 due to trail conditions; however, off-highway vehicles have continued to use these trails after closures. The result has been significant impact of the land. Greenup occurs in the valley bottoms and it draws wild ungulates into these areas for green forage at a time when they are low on fat reserves and late in pregnancy. Undue disturbances at this time can negatively affect survival and reproduction.

A defined closure date is required, as temporary closure dates on the website and signs has not resulted in compliance. It was decided that in the Job/Cline and Upper Clearwater/Ram Forest Land Use Zones, snow vehicles may operate until and including April 30 on the designated trails and off-highway vehicles can operate until and including March 15 on designated trails. The new re-print of the Bighorn Backcountry brochure and the website will be updated to reflect this change.

Wapiabi Cave

In 1999 it was recommended by the Alberta Speleological Society and the Special Places Committee that the Wapiabi Cave receive protective measures due to the hibernating bat population. It was questioned if the Wapiabi Cave and hibernating bat population currently receive adequate protection.

Community Development requires commercial permits for commercial operators to operate in the cave. There is concern of the hibernating bat population in the cave and it was recommended a closure date of September 30 for entrance into the cave. A sign will be installed at the cave entrance this summer to indicate this fall closure date and information regarding the reason for the closure.

Bighorn Backcountry Brochure Update

The recommendations from the Standing and Steering Committees for the Bighorn Backcountry brochure were presented. The March 16 closure date for off-highway vehicles in the Job/Cline and Upper Clearwater/Ram Forest Land Use Zones will be updated prior to the brochure being printed.

Open Floor Discussion

Panther Corners/Dormer Sheep Forest Land Use Zones technically fall into the Sustainable Resource Development Calgary office of jurisdiction. The Rocky Mountain House and Calgary offices will work together and ensure consistency within the department.

The Friends of the Eastern Slopes completed a work weekend at the Big Horn Campground, where 500 dead trees were felled and bucked. Federal Parks and volunteers participated in this work weekend.

The R11 Management Plan is not an access plan, but rather a plan involving prescribed burns and possibly some small logging for the reasons of insect outbreaks, wildlife habitat and increased risk of escape wildfires. The boundaries for this management plan are the same as the boundaries of the Bighorn Backcountry. A Charette process will be used with stakeholders to identify values, objectives and indicators. **ACTION:** It was recommended a representative from the R11 Planning Team present information at the next Standing Committee meeting.

Foothills Model Forest Grizzly Bear studies will continue this summer between Highway 11 and Highway 1. Signed bait stations will be installed to determine grizzly bear populations.

Arrangements will be made to have a backcountry guardian check the signs and toilet facilities at the Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area for vandalism, theft and servicing.

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 18, 2005.