

Bighorn Backcountry

Access Management Plan

Monitoring: Standing Committee

Meeting Summary

February 21, 2006, 9:00 AM

Rocky Mountain House Super 8 Motel

In Attendance

Calvin Rakach	Deb Schroderous	Rock Abraham	Derek Durocher
Roger Marvin	Dennis Schafer	Clarence Stewart	Ken Qually
Mike Gatens	Don Sarin	Kelly Fluet	Dana Quartly
Yvette Choma	Derry Armstrong	Myles Jensen	Ted Edwards
Lisa Block			

Chairpersons

Don Livingston	Wayne Crocker
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Regrets

Rob Hunter	Doug Ritchie	Mike Adolph	Philip Lacerte
Rick Artzen	Ken Schroderous	Jeff Willson	Jeff Baltzer
Steve Taylor	Christie Clark	Bob Long	Loyal Ma
Kristin McKenzie	Harlan Dixon	Lorne Hindbo	R.W. (Bobby) Turner
Sandi Phillips	James Brady	Earl Graham	Melanie Desjardin
Butch Shenfield	Jim Allen	Gary Mandrusiak	Sean Moore

Introduction

Don Livingston thanked everyone for attending the meeting. Some changes to both the standing and steering committees include:

- Bonnie Brewer is no longer the Fixed Commercial Alternate and a replacement campground operator is not available. It was asked if an alternate from the hostel or other accommodation would be considered by the group, or if there were any other recommendations.
- Forest Health Officer Dan Lux is replaced by Christie Ward.
- Compliance & Enforcement Officer Cory Wojtowicz of the Bow/Crow Area will join the steering committee.
- Phil Lacerte is seeking a Hunting & Fishing Alternate.
- First Nations Alternate Melanie Desjardin joins the standing committee.
- Alberta Economic Development's Sean Moore joins the steering committee as an alternate with Loren Winnick.

Harlan Dixon is currently attending another meeting and Rock Abraham is attending this meeting in his place.

Activities, Enforcement and Signing

This winter has been quiet for off-highway vehicle use with only one infraction in the Forty Mile Patrol Cabin area. Ice on some trails may make travel difficult and the website has been updated to reflect this condition. Some creek crossings may be dangerous and caution is advised when crossing any water body.

Ice climbing is very popular in some areas, particularly the Cline Gallery Trail.

Seasonal guardians have been hired for the 2006 season with one guardian responsible for signs and trails.

The department purchased a Kawasaki Mule for transporting young offenders and volunteers to complete trail maintenance.

The signing issues in the Onion Lake area are being addressed. One of two signs for the Wapiabi Cave & Trail is installed. There is concern of the small green embossed signs nailed to trees in the Onion Lake/Canary Creek/Hummingbird Creek area that indicate the designated trails. These signs are too small and the green colour is not visible enough for off-highway vehicle users to see while traveling. Each sign will be mounted on a 6"x6" reflective background to be more visible than nailed on to trees. There are many of these signs being posted and a large number of 4"x4" posts would be required to keep these signs off trees and in the ground. It has also been discussed the possibility of traditional 4"x4" or 6"x6" posts with four flat sides used as four-way distance markers. It was also suggested the possibility of Garden Thrones to be installed in the Canary Creek/Pleasant Valley junction and also towards Onion Lake.

More trail counters have been purchased and will be installed on specific trails. The Alberta Wilderness Association is monitoring some trails and has met with the department to exchange trail counter results.

Trail to South Ram

In 2005 the heavy rainfall resulted in severe erosion, particularly to a side hill that was previously repaired. Two different groups on two different days identified a higher and drier old wagon trail, leading to a destination area known as Broken Lantern Camp. The current trail is not the best trail and a portion of the trail has been closed due to erosion and safety reason. Forest Protection Division would prefer a destination area being close to water to encourage users to extinguish campfires. Fish & Wildlife Division will be consulted and members of the standing committee are asked to look at the map and give feedback regarding this old wagon trail.

Generally, more work is being completed on trails open for off-highway vehicle use than on trails used by equestrian users and it was questioned what will be done with these trails where work is required but not being completed. Some current trails are old seismic lines not meant for current heavy use and some trails may need to be moved or bypassed. With concept plans of all forest recreation areas nearly completed the focus may have to address trails.

The Alberta Wilderness Association has met with an equestrian organization, bringing forward their concerns of trails.

Coalbed Methane

Mike Gatens of MGV Energy Inc. gave a presentation on coalbed methane. These are long-term wells and a company's relationship with stakeholders is very important.

QUESTION: As there are many pipelines required due to the number of wells, how does this impact the landscape? ANSWER: Pipelines can be placed to parallel current pipelines, power lines and right-of-ways.

QUESTION: Wells in agriculture areas are much different than wells in the Bighorn Backcountry. ANSWER: There are increased costs to a company due to more trees, more rigid legislation and overall more hurdles that may affect whether or not wells are drilled. Currently it is very expensive to develop in the Eastern Slopes area and some coal may not be suitable or may be too small a quantity for coalbed methane drilling.

QUESTION: Can existing sour gas pipelines be used? ANSWER: No, different pipelines and compressor stations are required for coalbed methane.

Weyerhaeuser Presentation

Don Sarin, Kelly Fluet and Dana Quartly of Weyerhaeuser gave a presentation on road construction, the road to the Blackstone Gap Forest Recreation Area and road use towards the Blackstone/Wapiabi Forest Land Use Zone.

The current plan is to use the Wapiabi Road for the next two winters, the road to Marshybank area for the next three winters and the road to the Blackstone Gap five winters from this year. Some work was completed on the Chungo Road due to previous flooding and poor sight lines.

Through public advisory committee meeting once per month, recreation and commercial users meet with Weyerhaeuser. Major road construction is discussed through public open houses. Weyerhaeuser's main concern is having information on recreation and commercial trail use for the planning of roads and would appreciate any maps/sketches available.

The department is interested to work with Weyerhaeuser regarding the Adopt-A-Trail in the Marshybank area (Brazeau River Trail).

Recreation opportunities will increase in the Blackstone Gap when the road is improved. The potential for trail development should be reviewed prior to the road being constructed. Camping and staging opportunities should also be reviewed.

Cutoff Creek, Crescent Falls & Blackstone Gap Forest Recreation Areas

Blackstone Gap Forest Recreation Area

The final concept plan was distributed to all members. Due to the low area and limitation of the current forest recreation area, two higher and better areas have been identified as potential recreation areas. It is important to work with industry regarding the current and re-aligned road into the Blackstone Gap. A better road will result in increased use in the Blackstone Gap area, and it was questioned if there is an opportunity with Weyerhaeuser to create recreation trails from their logging roads. Mechanisms would be required to manage motorized recreation use after industry roads are constructed, as Weyerhaeuser does not manage the land and would not want high recreation traffic on roads during their peak traffic.

Oil and gas exploration is not in the area of the gap, but rather in the north portion of the forest land use zone.

Final copy of the concept plan was distributed to the committee members. The next step will be implementation.

Cutoff Creek Forest Recreation Area

The concept plan proposes solutions to the poor existing staging area, on-highway vehicle traffic on the north and south trails and the poor recreation area near the Clearwater River. Recommendations include a better staging/camping area to the east, a change in the forest land use boundary change to the east for traffic control and relocation of the west forest recreation area to higher area around Beaver Lake for recreation. The forest management area holder is in agreement with the change of the forest land use boundary to the east and commercial outfitters are in agreement if all users must abide by the same regulations.

There was standing committee concern that the area around Beaver Lake has a steep bank to the river; it was confirmed that there is one trail that leads to the river and the area may need to be revisited by the standing committee.

There is concern that the document distributed and the Blackstone Gap Forest Recreation Area Concept Plan are finalized concept plans and have not been read by members of the standing committee. It was agreed that all committee members are to read the distributed concept plans and forward information to their appropriate stakeholder groups. There is concern that some standing committee members are not reading information being mailed to them and not distributing information to their stakeholder groups, resulting in lack of information for those stakeholder groups. Comments from standing committee members and their stakeholder groups will be brought back to the committee.

There is concern that on-highway vehicle users are not represented, in regards to future hunting and fishing access from the north and south trails. Outfitters were consulted and are in agreement to the new forest land use boundary if all users must abide by the same regulations.

Committee members were asked to review the Cutoff Creek Forest recreation Area Concept Plan for finalization. A meeting will be arranged with local stakeholders to review the recommendations in the concept plan. The plan will be discussed at the next standing committee meeting for final endorsement.

Crescent Falls Forest Recreation Area

The Crescent Falls Forest Recreation Area and Provincial Recreation Area are situated in the same general area. Most off-highway vehicle traffic in this area originates from the Bighorn Dam for day trips. It is suggested that the parking lot in the provincial recreation area could be expanded and used as a staging area for off-highway vehicles with a link trail to the forest recreation area. This would require less work than road construction on the current poor road to the forest recreation area. There is concern of off-highway vehicles and equestrian users in the same staging area and on the same trail and the accommodation of future use. The vegetation on the link trail will be thinned to accommodate better visibility.

The concept plan will be revised to accommodate these changes and concerns and brought back to the standing committee.

Priorities for Forest Recreation Areas

At the previous meeting, priorities for all forest recreation areas were listed as high (repair existing), medium (expanding facilities or planning for future sites) and low (refinements). A cover sheet to this list will be added to identify that these priorities are in no particular order and may change.

It was suggested that the kiosk at Eagle Lake have a sign indicating the volunteer groups contributing labor and/or funds.

Panther River Trail

There is concern in this area over trail work that is required and if this trail work should be completed by hand or by equipment. Any future work in this area and the manner that it is completed will go through this committee and this committee is recognized by the Southern Rockies Area.

Pleasant Valley Trails

Equestrian use requires review as trails no longer used by off-highway vehicles are being damaged by equestrian use. Some trails are being short cut and some users will not use a designated off-highway vehicle trail, resulting in additional vegetation damage. It was suggested to assemble information for user education, utilizing equestrian groups and the department for information.

The committee discussed the need to address trail planning for specific areas within the Bighorn Backcountry. Main areas of concern are the areas around Cutoff Creek, South Ram, Pleasant Valley, Forty Mile, Ya Ha Tinda, Big Horn Dam and north, Hummingbird and the trail to Eagle Lake. Trail repair will be dependent on many factors including the area, distance into the area, width of trail and length of trail requiring repair. Historic trails may require review as options of trail re-routing and bypassing if required.

Derry Armstrong will consider possible approaches to trail planning and bring recommendations for discussion to the upcoming standing and steering committee meetings.

Trade Shows, Bighorn Backcountry Brochures & Website

A re-printing of 10,000 brochures will be completed and available prior to the May long weekend. No changes will be made and the closure dates for Wapiabi Cave and caving ethics will be included.

The next trade show is scheduled for the weekend of March 4th at the Red Deer Westerner Park, followed by the weekend of March 17th in Edmonton.

It was questioned at the previous standing committee meeting if the website could accommodate short video clips. It was confirmed that video clips could be accommodated.

Friends of the Eastern Slopes Summary

A summary was given regarding the work completed and funds donated. This summary was distributed to all members and to be posted on the Bighorn Backcountry website in conjunction with the summary notes. Clearwater County also donated culvert that was used in the Hummingbird Project.

Upcoming projects include:

- campsites at Eagle Creek Forest Recreation Area;
- repair to the flooded area of the Big Horn Campground and road, and
- gravel in the Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area and campground work.

The department will inquire with Alberta Transportation regarding the gravel pit near the Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area.

A summary of the Bighorn Dam Adopt-A-Trail was distributed to all members and will be posted on the Bighorn Backcountry website in conjunction with the summary notes. It was suggested that the Community Lottery Grant is a way to apply for project funding.

Congratulations to all the volunteers for their time and funds donated on construction, maintenance and services.

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 30th at 9:00 AM