

Bighorn Backcountry

Access Management Plan

Monitoring: Standing & Steering Committees

Meeting Summary

September 9, 2004

Royal Canadian Legion, Rocky Mountain House

In Attendance

Jack Walker	Calvin Rakach	Jeff Wilson	Bob Haagsma
Deb Schroderous	James Brady	Ken Zelt	Lorne Hindbo
Dennis Schafer	Clarence Stewart	Bob Long	Loyal Ma
Bonnie Brewer	Derek Durocher	Philip Lacerte	Gord Klassen
Yvette Choma	Don Livingston	Derry Armstrong	Lisa Block
Gary Mandrusiak	Wayne Crocker	Myles Jensen	David Helmer
James Allen	Anne Anderson		

Chairperson

Butch Shenfield

Regrets

Greg Mallo	Rob Hunter	Kristin McKenzie	Doug Ritchie
Rick Artzen	Mike Adolph	Christie Clark	Cheri Adolph
Ken Schroderous	R.W. (Bobby) Turner		

Dave Christiansen	Dan Lux	Loren Winnick
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Introduction

Butch Shenfield thanked everyone for attending the meeting, with both Standing Committee and Steering Committee members present.

Wayne Crocker from Alberta Sustainable Resource Development was introduced. Wayne replaces Ron Taylor as the Backcountry Coordinator.

Jeff Willson is the representative for Eco-tourism, replacing Richard Smith.
Derek Durocher is the representative for Hiking, replacing Nathan Moore.
The position of alternates for both Eco-tourism and hiking will be announced as the positions are filled.

Activities, Enforcement and Signing

The September long-weekend was very busy, but numbers were lower in comparison to the May long-weekend. Some schools in the area began the school year the end of August; however, this did not appear to affect the visitor population.

The majority of violations appear to be decreasing in number, with the majority of infractions being off-highway vehicle violations from non-local people.

Damage to signs has been minimal, including some signs damaged by wildlife.

ACTION: Onion Lake Trail requires a better sign informing people to stay on the trail.

In the Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area, one kiosk is currently constructed and will be installed when weather permits. The Alberta Equestrian Federation provided the funding for this kiosk. Original kiosks also exist in the forest recreation area and at the trailhead of the Canary Creek Trail. Many positive comments regarding the toilet facilities were received. Some temporary electric fences were erected, and less people appeared to tie horses to trees.

Due to precipitation during the spring and summer months, increased impact on the trails occurred this year in comparison to previous years. Some Adopt-A-Trail members completed trail work, including some bridge construction.

With the Jasper and Banff National Parks strike during the latter portion of the summer, an influx in the visitor population to the Bighorn Backcountry was not noticed.

This winter, Alberta Transportation will provide snow removal for Highway 11 Pinto Lake Trail and Cline River Trail approaches. The area along Highway 11 that received a summer mudslide will be hardened-off for parking and receive snow removal.

Photographs of construction for the trail around Ya Ha Tinda were presented. This trail was constructed last winter and it was decided by the Standing Committee to have the first year open to only snow vehicle and non-motorized users. However, insufficient snow conditions did not allow any snow-vehicle use permits to be issued during the winter season.

In the Eagle Creek Forest Recreation Area, an electric fence had been installed throughout several sites for a long time period, and resulted in grazing damage. Charges were issued to the individual, resulting in a court appearance.

Range cages to monitor grazing and impacts will be installed. Overgrazing is a concern in some areas, as grazing occurs after the end of the growing season and grass cannot recover. Supplemental feed is a potential option, to reduce the impacts of grazing.

Trail counters are being re-set for the fall season. Some trail counters may also work with cameras, with the photographs identifying the type of user or wildlife.

Don Livingston attended the World Mountain Bike Conference in Vancouver.

Some of the key items brought forward included:

- Volunteers are very important as trail stewards, and are brought into the initial planning stage through to the project completion and future maintenance. Volunteer “crew leaders” are trained to lead volunteers through projects.
- In other provinces and countries, compliance occurs without legislation.
- A small population maintains a large number of trails with a large visitor population. Many locations are “destination areas” similar to the Bighorn Backcountry.
- Other provinces, countries, and jurisdictions have more government staff in recreation positions.
- Very few off-highway vehicle use occurs in some provinces and other countries.

Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area

The Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area Concept Plan was approved by both Standing and Steering Committees in the spring of 2004. Recently, three toilet facilities were installed and have received many positive comments. Campsite areas at the west portion and near Hummingbird Falls have been walked with a Global Positioning Satellite (gps).

Due to member opposition of the “thank you” and “donation” signs, only the “Under Construction” sign will be installed later in the month. The Forest Reserves Act indicates any sign on public land must have approval from the land manager. With this act, all future signs will require written approval from Sustainable Resource Development prior to installation. Any other future work will require written approval from Sustainable Resource Development. A Memorandum of Agreement will be developed to ensure that volunteers and Sustainable Resource Development have the same understanding and expectations. Trappers completing trail work beyond regular trail maintenance will require written approval from Sustainable Resource Development. It was suggested a Memorandum of Agreement between trappers and Sustainable Resource Development be developed.

Some random campers are placing their garbage at the Ram Falls Provincial Recreation Area, rather than taking the garbage to a waste transfer site. All provincial recreation areas have signs indicating garbage bins are for their users. Currently, some random camping areas have donated garbage bins installed only for the May long weekend. It was suggested that signs be installed at the forest recreation areas indicating the closest waste transfer site, hours of operation, and map of location to encourage random campers to take their garbage to these sites. It was also suggested a user fee at the forest recreation area to cover costs of garbage bins and garbage removal.

ACTION: Waste transfer site signs will be developed and installed.

ACTION: Clearwater County and the Solid Waste Authority will be approached regarding a walk-through swing gate at the waste transfer sites that have limited hours of operation.

ACTION: At the next Standing Committee meeting, forest recreation area users fees will be discussed.

Donation funds from the Alberta Equestrian Federation and donations and grant money initiated from Friends of the Eastern Slopes will be put towards tree clearing and a possible manure drop-off site. Concern was raised regarding fallen brush, stumps and branches, with the possibility of these to be placed in a firewood area available to users.

ACTION: Clearing will occur late October and early November with the presence of cold weather and little snow.

Eagle Creek Forest Recreation Area

Both the Standing and Steering Committee members endorsed the Eagle Creek Forest Recreation Area Concept Plan at the last meetings. Copies of the concept plan were distributed.

This concept plan will be a guide for upcoming years. Some clearing will be completed in the west portion of the forest recreation area. The trail through the lease located north of the road is being deterred of use, and users are encouraged to go around the lease.

New Forest Recreation Area Concept Plans for 2004

Blackstone Gap, Cutoff Creek, and Crescent Falls Forest Recreation Areas will have concept plans developed.

Cutoff Creek Forest Recreation Area has old ramps, some toilet facilities, a parking area, and drive-through parking stalls. Equestrian users are tying horses to trees in the random sites near the parking area. There is concern for the following:

- standing dead trees;
- improper tie rails and fire rings;
- soft soils and soft road leading to the Clearwater River;
- unhardened soils at tie rail locations, and
- riverbank erosion from repeat use.

Due to permanent wet ground conditions, it was recommended a new and dry area for development be located in the forest recreation area. Camping stalls were recommended to be situated to the east, with the end of the existing road to accommodate all users.

Blackstone Gap Forest Recreation Area is a light-use camping area, with the potential for resource extraction in the general area. A poor road exists to the forest recreation area, with many hills that may deter vehicles with large trailers when weather conditions are not favorable. The forest recreation area boundary is small when considering future potential sites.

Crescent Falls Forest Recreation Area has a current kiosk and a small clearing for on-highway vehicle parking. There is very little evidence of random camping.

ACTION: Individual meetings for the forest recreation areas are scheduled for November 3, 2004 at the following times:

Cutoff Creek Forest Recreation Area: 9:00AM to 11:00 AM

Crescent Falls Forest Recreation Area: 11:15 AM to lunch

Blackstone Gap Forest Recreation Area: 1:30PM

Recommendations from these meetings will be returned to the Standing and Steering Committees for final endorsements. Some Standing and Steering Committee members will attend one or more of these meetings.

Standards for Commercial and Non-Commercial Users

A set of standards is required for trails, structures, practices, commercial and non-commercial users, and all users.

With commercial users, some current problems include the following:

- weeds;
- overgrazing;
- structures remaining after end of season;
- number of horses per person, and
- non-recognized outfitters in outfitters' areas.

In December, Sustainable Resource Development will meet with Commercial Trail Riding operators and guides/outfitters, and several Standing Committee members to discuss their business.

Commercial Camps

The discussion of commercial camps will be moved to the next Standing Committee meeting, due to the December meeting regarding standards.

Coalbed methane exploration wells are potential in the Kiska / Willson Forest Land Use Zone. It was recommended an industry representative attend the next Standing Committee meeting, to explain the process and answer questions.

ACTION: Sustainable Resource Development will contact industry for a representative to attend the next Standing Committee meeting.

Trappers

Gord Klassen, president of the Alberta Trappers Association, gave a presentation on behalf of the trappers. The Alberta Trappers Association would like trappers to have year-round motorized-vehicle access on their Registered Fur Management Areas. Currently, trappers within Job / Cline, Upper Clearwater / Ram, Blackstone / Wapiabi and Panther Corners Forest Land Use Zones receive a letter of authorization permitting off-highway vehicle use during the trapping season, and possibly outside the trapping season for maintenance.

Concern was raised that previously-existing forest land use zones and permit letters did not appear to be an issue. Currently trappers are permitted 180 days per year for trapping and maintenance, and it was questioned why 365 days is required to perform the same maintenance.

It was commented that a couple weeks above the 180 days should be sufficient to perform all maintenance. It was questioned if year-round access would be for the Senior Licence Holder or the holder and all partners. The Alberta Trappers Association indicated for safety reasons this request would be for the Senior Licence Holder and all registered partners, including spouses and resident children under 18 years of age.

Some current public criticism mentions that trappers are permitted to travel with off-highway vehicles where others cannot. It was commented that some trappers may not wish to travel with off-highway vehicles, but rather non-motorized methods of travel.

ACTION: The request from the Alberta Trappers Association will be taken to the Steering Committee.

Open Floor Discussion

Friends of the Eastern Slopes has grant money available for projects in the Bighorn Backcountry. Concern was raised regarding existing and potential equestrian damage, with the future standards to address this concern. It was questioned if the trail around Ya Ha Tinda would be open to off-highway vehicles this winter, with the possibility of off-highway vehicle permits not being issued during warm weather or periods of large snowfall.

For potential trail names, it was recommended a “naming contest” to local schools and youth groups, organizations and first nations. This would achieve community involvement, and is how Abraham Lake received its name. Selected Standing Committee members will organize and gather suggestions, with all names being brought forward to the Standing and Steering Committees.

During the planning of the forest recreation areas, Forest Protection Division would like to make recommendations regarding fuel reduction planning. It was also requested a small poster-size area on each kiosk be available for posting of wildfire information.

ACTION: A photograph of the new kiosk will be sent to Forest Protection Division.

The next meeting will be scheduled for Thursday, January 20, 2005 at the Rocky Mountain House Museum (5406-48 Street).