

Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan

Monitoring: Standing Committee

June 27, 2011 FINAL COPY
Super 8 Motel - Rocky Mountain House

In Attendance

Wayne Crocker	Gordon Sanders	Neil Godlonton	Jim Duncan
Laura Raivio	Kevin Wirtanen	Myles Jensen	Don Rilling
Dennis Schafer	Lonnie Earl	Rita Stagman	Trevor Tarnowski
Roger Marvin	Lorne Hindbo	Robin McDonald	

Chair

Wayne Crocker

Introduction

Everyone thanked for attending the meeting. Round-table introductions were completed.

At the prior meeting Staging Area / Trail Adoptee representatives had stepped down, new representative and alternate were announced. We are still awaiting word on replacements for First Nations representatives after band council changeover at the Bighorn. Noted the tragic loss of Brent Young, representative of fixed commercial on the Standing Committee.

Emerald Award

Bighorn Backcountry Monitoring Group, Standing Committee was awarded the Emerald Award, under the realm of Shared Footprints. This is quite an honor and recognizes the many hours of work that has gone into making cooperative efforts of the multiple user groups in the Bighorn Backcountry a success.

Bighorn Dam Site Update

History – TransAlta notified SRD that last fall/spring that they would not longer have staff onsite and a plan needed to be made to manage the activities occurring in the area. Ideas bounced between SRD, County and Parks. After some discussions, it was thought that a managed facility project was the way to proceed. Trails will still be there, still maintained through OHV group but would need to funnel money to group somehow, details to come. Trevor Tarnowski of Parks will be the overall project manager.

Parks – everything at the Bighorn site will remain status quo for now. Right now the Parks Planning group is developing a proposal for future facilities on the site and is seeking input from key stakeholder groups who want to become involved in the process. Process objective is to

work with stakeholders and Albertans to arrive at a vision for development of the Bighorn Dam site that supports and enhances the OHV camping and trail riding experience in the area.

Process Outline

- Preplanning process has begun and a site analysis has identified several areas within the planning area that are suitable for future development.
- Parks will work with key stakeholders from July to December to come up with the nuts and bolts of what will go into those areas.
- Parks is excited about getting input from the Standing Committee to see what design ideas they can provide for development of the site
- This project will steer future development through the next 10-20 years.
- Once the key stakeholder consultations and internal proposal development process is completed, the proposed plan will be available for review and comments by all Albertans during a public comment period (Feb – March?)
- Based on the public feedback received a decision to proceed with the project and/or any required revisions to the plan will be made prior to the plan being formally approved.

Details are unknown at this point but the vision is there. Planning area is roughly from Tershishner to, Hwy 11 to the N. Saskatchewan, dam to the First Nations reserve. There are some concerns on the reserve regarding access, so they may look at creating a buffer. There are pockets within the defined area with good access as well as already established areas. TransAlta has already fenced off areas that will have no access. General intent is to still allow OHV's but on designated trails.

Is this to be a PRA or Park? PRA

Have to look at the cost and then decide if private sector or Parks running it. Must look at all of the opportunities first then weed it down to what people actually want. Standing Committee representatives interested in becoming involved? Let Trevor know (separate e-mail was sent to committee members)

Concern - would not like to see the entire block as a no hunting zone? Not necessarily happening that way. Groups encouraged to become involved in the sessions for brainstorming so these concerns can be brought forward.

There is already power at some sites, checking on sewer lagoons and a water system.

Timelines – final product hopefully a year from now. If all goes well we can look at construction in spring 2013. Is this a user-pay system or tax payer money? Not certain yet. Parks recognizes the OHV users have a need and govt needs to develop appropriate sites.

Is this the pathway to eliminating random camping? This is a step to trying to develop an experience for people in a more controlled manner.

Activities

May long weekend – estimated 40% less people in the area. The fire ban may have deterred many users and people were very compliant with the fire ban. Good compliance generally but many people wounded and accidents, one fatality (natural causes). Lots of alcohol and craziness was taking place. The rain on the Monday deterred people from the ongoing struggle to get them to clean up properly. Fourteen garbage bins were put out at a cost tally of \$10,825.00, and for the most part they were used and successful. Education and enforcement definitely needs to continue. County councillors were at a check stop handing out garbage bags and education, and generally were well received. People are from all over and not just from Clearwater so we are still having a hard time to get them to respect area. People were calling for area information from Ontario this year which has never happened before.

Summary of Activity 2011

NM * - No measure, data was not collected during this time

ITEM	YEAR					
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
TASK FORCE OFFICERS	NM*	100	132	108	112	127
PEOPLE CHECKED	10,187	14,769	17,006	7,662+	8,250+	11,783+
OHV'S CHECKED	3,550	3,519	2869	1,635	3,300+	3000+
MONSTER TRUCKS	20	31	40	20+	30+	12+
HORSES	100 +	100 +	100+	100+	50+	10+
JET BOATS	7	7	5	7	0	2
CANOES	0	35	10	15+	0	0
WRITTEN TICKETS	513	870	1,051	1,028	1,071	846
WRITTEN WARNINGS	44	50	90	NM	151	26
VERBAL WARNINGS	402 +	500 +	500+	346+	NM	477
IMPAIRED DRIVERS	5	7	8	24	5	4
24 HR SUSPENSIONS	NM*	18	14	NM	16	4
AMBULANCE CALLS	22 +	6	12+	NM	NM	NM
ARRESTS	24	50	14	48	36	41
ABANDONED/DAMAGED VEHICLES	2	5	5	2	4	2
ABANDONED FIRES	14	25	22	25	25	4

Emergency Room Visits 2011

Hospital				
INJURY	Rimbey	Drayton Valley	Rocky Mtn House	Sundre
Dirt-Bike Related	0	NM	6	3
Quad-Related	0	NM	25	4
Camping	0	NM	14	26
Horse-Related	0	NM	2	2
Boating	0	NM	0	0
Rec. General	43	NM	9	2
Intoxicated	0	NM	5	0
MVC	0	NM	7	1
Assault	0	NM	1	2
Total Patients Seen	43	NM	69	40

Suggestion was brought up to start some advertising showing how it would be to use the same irresponsible behaviour in their city/town backyard. Was there any advertising for the presence of garbage bins? They are right there and easily accessible/noticeable. Providing more services of this nature could be promoting a negative. It could result against teaching people to pack out what they pack in.

It was noted that many people learn from peer pressure. One way to initiate something would be start a program to put peer pressure on people by officers and users alike. Perhaps a sign to hang on your tent, etc. that read something like "I'm redneck Alberta and I love my country. This crew will commit to....before we leave this area" and the more we show others we care, it may spread. Another example was "Bighorn Standing Committee approved campsite". Show what is the proper behaviour and set an example. Currently only recognition of following the rules is a tag on quads to make it so they don't get checked again. Instead of a tagged quad, a sign is a tag for campsites who want to show they are compliant. Online forums are finding irresponsible behaviour as well. If the committee would like to pursue that idea, forward ideas to the Standing Committee admin, something brief. The Standing Committee is award winning and if they want to use that to set a stamp, they should as opposed to a govt. stamp.

Vision for the Bighorn

At a stage where the five year review is still happening so we are trying to look further down the road. What are both the Steering and Standing Committees seen as doing in the future? LUF is still in the works and the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan should give us a clearer vision of where we would like to go. SRD has input and thoughts on the group but we need to look further along to trail opening/closing ability, etc. Hopefully the group will have some input but where we fit in is unclear and we would like ideas from the Standing Committee. Looking more at trail usage, FRA work but those plans have already been developed, more so looking at trails.

We need to use the proper language when referring to the trails and try to refer to them in these terms. Lands has an Alberta Recreation Corridor & Trails Classification manual that is recommended reading.

Trappers – trappers have had logging on the trap line. Logging companies are closing off trails leaving no access and the trappers are having to struggle to maintain existing trails. Trappers have to work with logging company but the trail gets torn up and closed off. It's becoming a problem for trapper travel. Would like to see more designated trails to get around and can't keep just closing them down. It's putting more pressure on other areas by closing trails to OHV's instead of maintaining them. Still a lot of work coming and it needs to be managed. Outside of FLUZ are a lot of unmanaged linear disturbances. It's an ongoing discussion about what is somewhat sustainable vs. what is not desired to be used in the future, between Lands, Fish & Wildlife and other govt. bodies. We have a good inventory of trails within the FLUZ, not so much outside of it for access. This group is primarily FLUZ oriented but SRD is in discussions with forest management on "trails" of interest outside of zones.

Could the group become a voice of Clearwater Area instead of just the FLUZ? Could this be part of the vision? LUF and NSRP are coming and it is the opportunity to be heard. New regulations etc. to become familiar with for FLUZ so we would have to have dual frames of mind. Three opportunities for public to comment on plans are coming up. RAC (Regional Advisement Committee) – public input coming together with regional advisory. The three are - awareness, public comment, final comment after draft is made. County is on the committee and can take suggestions back to the RAC. There are many ways to have your influence heard through your groups, private sector, etc. as opposed to this committee.

FOESA Update

Not present

CTR Meeting

There was a meeting in spring with CTR (Commercial Trail Riders). Discussions of the lack of maintenance on trails, but those trails are not multiuse so how to do maintenance? How to get tools, etc in without machinery? Ideas? Suggest identifying areas, prioritize and then address on an as needed basis. Lots of hours have been on trail maintenance but not reported. Users have cut out blowdown on trails but if not using them often it doesn't get done. This summer SRD is asking for equestrians and motorized to be taking pictures and identifying problem areas. FOESA had hired a contractor to do some work. OHV group work is resulting in some areas that are getting fairly sustainable. The worst trails are eroded down to a certain depth where they may be down to hard ground. Equestrian representative asked to spread the word.

Change of Trail Usage

See copy outlining the old Clearwater Horse Trail. That trail is an historic horse trail that connected up our old Forestry cabins (i.e. Headwaters, Meadows, Clearwater Ranger Station, et.). Right now it is designated as multiuse but hard to maintain as multiuse. Trail adoptee cannot keep up with multiuse maintenance and asking it to be turned into non-motorized. The surrounding trails not maintained by the adoptee but are multiuse as well. This trail has been in use for many years. It might be worth a look but means exclusion of one group. Motorized user

stated the trail was not worth it with an ATV as it's not OHV friendly at all, very sideways. It is pretty primitive and hidden. Suggestion - put counters on to check OHV use then take next step. There would be signage and notification on the website if closure to OHV. Consult with TrailNet for data and then decide whether to remove. That area needs discussions for sledding as well. SRD will check with adoptee on timeline as we definitely need more info. Summer motorized and SRD will be in contact after speaking with consultant.

Suggested that this needs to be thought of in part of vision as well....will we need that trail open for OHV then? Some trails will have to be expanded. We want to have the ability for closure, change of designation and opening of trails. Two principle components - having the right trail and the capacity to keep it up. Trails should only be on the map if these two principles are met.

General Discussion – suggest more info on trail up Kidd Creek into a loop around Joyce through sheep country. Should that trail be allowed through there? Discussion and info on perhaps closing that section of trail? Fourteen days of work on that trail would be made mute. What are the facts on the sheep in the area, studies on impacts? Closure may not be the wisest but maybe building alternate access? Statement that there is not great access otherwise. Maybe closing just during spring lambing? There is regular cat hunting there but unsure otherwise. Cutting off the section may be cutting off the loop. Controlling access and making it more difficult makes hunter management a factor as well. Sheep population worries - why have non-trophy permits in there? Having protection on sheep would eliminate the hunter access problem. Will have a facts gathering session and bring up to Steering Committee.

Edmonton Recreation Update

Status and progress updates were provided on:

- Land Use Framework: Lower Athabasca Regional Plan, South Saskatchewan Regional Plan and the North Saskatchewan Regional Plan <https://www.landuse.alberta.ca/Pages/default.aspx>
- Public Land Administration Regulation
- Provincial delegated trail authority initiative
- Parks legislation
- Recreation and Tourism Management Strategy
- TPR Recreation Data System: including Recreation and Tourism Features Inventory, Recreation/Tourism Opportunity Spectrum Model, Scenic Resource Assessment Model, and the Significant Recreation and Tourism Areas model
- Trail route modeling too

Floor

Recreational vehicle dealers are asking what's happening in the west country and is there something OHV/camper dealers can do at that level? Core messages don't need govt. stamp and

anyone can use them. Messaging from SRD is diminishing with less people for delivery. Looking more and more to public for spreading the word on acceptable behaviors and what is suitable. Being able to deliver the message is getting very difficult, it will fall back to public.

Breakout group will be meeting with the Parks representative during the August field day. Day will consist of 1st half field, 2nd half meeting.

Steering & Standing Committees Field Date:

August 10, 2011 Bighorn Dam Site - walking tour (a.m.)
Breakout Group – Bighorn Dam Site Input (p.m.)

Next Standing Committee Meeting Date – October 3, 2011