

Bighorn Backcountry

Access Management Plan

Monitoring: Standing Committee

Meeting Summary
February 4th, 2010 9:00 AM
Rocky Mountain House Provincial Building

In Attendance

Myles Jensen	Robert Popowich	Yvette Choma	Cal Rakach
Ken Qually	Dennis Schafer	Wayne Crocker	Clarence Stewart
Roger Marvin	Brent Young	Loyal Ma	Neil Godlonton
Marvin Abraham	Paul Radchenko	Bernie Schmitte	Doug Ritchie
Margarete Hee	Chiara Feder	Lorne Hindbo	Rick Artzen

Chairperson

Don Livingston

Regrets

Cory Wojtowicz	Dick Wymenga	Kevin Wirtanen	Robin McDonald
Phil Lacerte	Elder Rock Abraham	James Brady	Mike Adolph
John Evans	Kristin McKenzie	Sandi Phillips	Rob Hunter
R.W. Tuner	Bob Long	Steve Taylor	Jeff Willson
Jeff Baltzer	Derek Durocher	Rita Stagman	Gordon Sanders
Kevin Gagne			

Introduction

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

Bighorn Dam Area

A presentation from TransAlta will be rescheduled for the next meeting. TransAlta has concerns of motorized users driving above dam instruments, exposure of dam infrastructure and erosion from motorized and non-motorized users. It has been proposed for the construction of a designated campground with 100 sites to accommodate the current activity and eliminate the “free for all” camping that currently exists.

The standing committee is pleased that TransAlta is happy to work with the users and not close the area. Photographs of the Bighorn Dam volunteer trail work were distributed.

Activities, Enforcement and Signing

Winter conditions began well but considerable snow has now depleted. Many ice climbers frequent the Nordegg area and there is an ice climbing festival the end of February.

Several individuals with infractions were served, as follow-up to previous non-compliance. This included individuals operating on-highway vehicles in the Bighorn Dam area and off-highway vehicles in the Blackstone/Wapiabi area.

In the Nordegg area there is interest regarding ski trails that are not for off-highway vehicle winter use. Ski trail grooming was completed many years ago. Currently there has not been a volunteer to groom trails. Please contact Don if you are interested.

The Littlehorn Trail currently has two volunteers working to improve the trail from the White Goat Trail and the Littlehorn Trail accesses. A volunteer recently sustained serious injuries while working on the Littlehorn Trail. It is asked if there is an alternative for a winter-access trail due to the trail's previous flooding, erosion and areas that are grown with vegetation. Also, considerable snow is required to travel this trail during the winter. Equestrian users commented the Littlehorn Trail is narrow and the Bighorn Trail may be a better option. The Department will walk this general area next summer and identify possible options. Please forward any recommendations to Don

A standing committee member requested if trails with timing restrictions could be open for only snow vehicle use beginning December 1st due to snow rutting from off-highway vehicle tires. Currently, off-highway vehicles can travel trails with timing restrictions until and including March 15th and snow vehicles can travel trails with timing restrictions until and including April 30th. The Alberta Snowmobile Association should bring this discussion forward to the Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association. Some users operate off-highway vehicles with tracks and not tires. The Department is reviewing the Alberta TrailNet classification and definitions for off-highway vehicles:

<http://www.tpr.alberta.ca/recreation/trails/classification.aspx>

The Commercial Trail Riding operators met for their annual meeting. Grazing in the Forest Reserve, weed-free feed and supplies remaining on public lands after season close were discussed. There is concern from operators regarding the area commonly referred to as Bench Camp. A local hunting guide monopolizes this area during the autumn and this area experiences very high use. Recommendations and concerns for the Bench Camp area included the following:

- create a day use area with a timing (date) restriction for overnight camping
- create a day use area with a “no overnight camping area” of a designated size
- concern of user displacement and creation of additional sacrifice areas if overnight camping was not permitted
- concern that this area is a wintering area for sheep
- create a “no stopping zone” due to wildlife issues, similar to “no stopping zones” on the Scalp Creek Trail.

An area for no camping will require a designated size. This area will permit parking of off-highway vehicles. Signing will be required.

Integrated Land Management (ILM)

Margarete Hee presented a video of Integrated Land Management and copies were distributed to all members. The approach of the Integrated Land Management process is sharing the land for all users including commercial, recreation and industry with planning / operational guidelines. Some members of the standing committee participated in the process.

With the Alberta TrailNet inventory, users can be educated of suitable and unsuitable trails and areas for use, appropriate times for use and appropriate activities for the trails and areas. Alberta TrailNet draft maps were posted in the room for comments by the standing committee members. These maps were presented at an open house in Nordegg for the public to make comments. The maps are for general use and not for navigational purposes.

There is concern that volunteer funding and work completed on public trails needs protection from the Department. Volunteers feel that the Department should be funding a portion of these projects. A portion of registration fees for off-highway vehicles should go back to the community and be put towards trail maintenance.

Prescribed Burning

Bernie Schmitte presented the Clearwater Area Prescribed Burn Program. In 2009 preparations and operations included the following:

- Blackstone Gap (capping unit)
- Ya Ha Tinda (burn was initiated on federal land and moved on to public land)
- South Idlewilde (in conjunction with Alberta Conservation Association to improve ungulate habitat)
- Upper Saskatchewan 1 (in conjunction with Parks Canada).

Mountain Pine Beetle surveys are being completed in the Upper Saskatchewan 1 area. A fire ecology trail (Landslide Lake Fire Interpretative Trail) will be developed for the public. Vegetative recovery is rapid.

2010 operations may include the following prescribed burns, pending weather:

- Blackstone, Wapiabi and Chungo Gaps
- Upper Clearwater
- Ya Ha Tinda / Hat Mountain
- Upper Saskatchewan Unit 2.

Open Floor

Standing Committee Fixed Accommodation Representative Christie Clark is no longer operating campgrounds. Alternate Brent Young will replace Christie as the representative. A new individual from either fixed roof or campground accommodation will become the alternate.

The 2010 Bighorn Backcountry brochure will be re-printed this month. There will not be large changes or additions to the brochure.

The Department will participate in the February Red Deer Sportsman Show. The Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association will participate in the Edmonton Sportsman Show.

In the Ghost area many mountain bike users have smartphones to store trail information. Don is exploring this as a possibility for the Bighorn Backcountry

It was recommended to have additional signs in the South Ram lookout area and Friends of the Eastern Slopes is willing to donate funds towards these signs. Alberta Trail Riders Association recommends additional signs in the Hummingbird area and is willing to donate funds towards these signs.

It was asked if the Department is aware of equestrian endurance riders planning a major function. At this time the Department has not been notified or contacted. There is concern of the impact this gathering would have on the Hummingbird area.
POST MEETING FOLLOW-UP: Endurance riders are planning an event on private land near the Sundre area. There are no intentions of an event in the Bighorn Backcountry.

Winter motorized users would like to propose a one month extension to the existing timing restrictions for snow vehicle use. Snow vehicles are permitted to operate until and including April 30th. Conditions without snow would not permit snow vehicles to operate. There is concern of wildlife calving areas during the month of May. This proposal will be brought to the steering committee.

Friends of the Eastern Slopes annual dinner is being held February 20, 2010. It is open for all to attend.

Friends of the Eastern Slopes presented a cheque of \$2000 to the Bighorn Heritage ATV Society for volunteer trail work. Bighorn Heritage ATV Society presented a cheque of \$500 to Friends of the Eastern Slopes for facility maintenance.

It was asked if guardians will be hired during the 2010-2011 year. At this time it is not known the hiring situation but more information will be available when the new budgets are released. The May long-weekend task force is being planned with all agencies. Search and rescue organizations could be brought into the task force on a more formal avenue. Other volunteers may be able to assist by providing educational information and talking to the public, similar to the activities of campground hosts.

Residents of the Big Horn Indian Reserve have concerns of motorized vehicles accessing the reserve from public lands. The reserve has posted signs on the boundary, but these signs are vandalized and stolen. It was suggested that the Department install signs on the areas that access the reserve, to indicate these areas are not designated trails.

Next standing committee meeting: June 3, 2010 at the Rocky Mountain House Provincial Building, Main Floor.