

Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan

Monitoring: Standing Committee

June 4, 2008

Red Deer College, Rocky Mountain House

In Attendance

Cal Rakach	Kristin McKenzie	Ken Qually	Roger Marvin
James Brady	Clarence Stewart	John Evans	Kevin Gagne
Justin Ellis	Yvette Choma	Derry Armstrong	Chiara Feder
Myles Jensen	Robin McDonald	Loyal Ma	Jack Walker
Doug Ritchie	Brent Young	Derek Durocher	Rick Artzen
Dennis Schafer	Lorne Hindbo		

Chairperson

Don Livingston Wayne Crocker

Regrets

Bob Long	Rob Hunter	Bernie Schmitte	Cory Wojtowicz
Marvin Abraham	Jeff Baltzer	Phil Lacerte	Dick Wymenga
Ken Schroderous	Elder Rock Abraham	R.W. (Bobby) Turner	Christie Clark
Jeff Wilson	Steve Taylor	Deb Schroderous	Sandi Phillips
Rob Popowich	Mike Adolph		

Introduction

Don Livingston thanked everyone for attending the meeting. Thank you to representative Jeff Baltzer for arranging the room at Red Deer College.

- Tourism Development Planner Sean Moore has taken a position in Victoria, BC effective May 9, 2008. His replacement has not been announced.
- Recreation Steward / Partner Coordinator Kevin Wirtanten will be working with the Alberta Stewardship network for one year.
- Local resident Martha Kostuch passed away. She was a member of the Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan committee as an Environmental representative.

Activities, Enforcement and Signing

Effective May 1, 2008 the Bighorn Dam area was restricted from off-highway vehicle use. Notice was given to the public through trade shows, newspapers, websites and media releases. During the May long weekend, educational staff were on site and the restriction was generally not an issue. However, considerable damage to muskegs between the dam and Nordegg occurred, and the Department is installing signs to indicate these areas are not trails for off-highway vehicle use.

During this same weekend, a Husky main pipeline was exposed. The company is evaluating the damage and what will be required for repairs. It was noted that the Caroline Snowmobile Club installed culvert and riprap over seven unnamed creeks to keep motorized traffic away from pipelines and to protect creek crossings.

During the May long weekend in the Clearwater Area, 132 officers worked in the field and the area was busy but not chaotic. Generally, off-highway vehicle compliance was very good with a few headlight / taillight issues regarding dirt bikes. facebook.com was used to track 11 parties that were visited. Photographs of the pipelines experiencing heavy use were distributed to the committee members, with the request that these same areas be photographed in a few months to show vegetation recovery.

User Checks

- Total users: 17, 006
- On-highway vehicles: 4806
- Off-highway vehicles
(may include side-by-side & motorcycle): 2785
- Dirt bikes: 80
- Side-by-side off-highway vehicles: 4
- Monster trucks: 40
- Boats: 15
- Commercial vehicles: 150

Arrests: 10

24 Hour Suspensions: 14

Impaired Drivers: 6

Commercial vehicles placed out of service: 11

Ambulance calls: 12+

Medivacs (air transportation): 4+

Abandoned fires extinguished: 22

3 motorcycles west of Rocky Mountain House clocked at 175km/hr

1 motorcycle near Rocky Mountain House clocked at 221 km/hr

Tickets Written

- Impaired driver: 6
- Traffic Safety Act: 714
- Off-highway vehicle: 96
- Fisheries: 35
- Liquor: 97
- Other: 19
- Forest Land Use Zone: 4
- Litter: 8

TOTAL: 979

Written Warnings: 90

Near the Hummingbird patrol cabin, Clearwater County will be required to grade the road. At the previous staging area, there remains recent garbage on the grass area located on the north side of this road.

Potential summer construction projects include the following:

- Eagle Creek Forest Recreation Area: removal of hazard trees, site upgrades, removal of old and installation of new hitching rails, installation of new fire rings, removal of old toilet and consider the river bank erosion.
- Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area: close one loop road and the trail to the falls, close the trail along the creek, addition of more gravel, review the site west of Irvin Palmer's old camp and possibly locate a site for commercial equestrian operations. It was later requested that Fish and Wildlife Division biologists discuss the closure of the one loop road in regards to grizzly bear habitat and general wildlife.
- Cutoff Creek Forest Recreation Area: toilets require installation, parking lot was re-graveled and possibility to expand the camping area.

The Clearwater Trails Initiative and the Land Use Framework recognize that industry planning should also consider current and future recreation use. It was mentioned that future pipeline depths can be discussed between the stakeholder(s) and industry.

Upper Clearwater/Ram Trail Inventory & Plan

The Upper Clearwater/Ram Forest Land Use Zone Trail Inventory 2007 was distributed to the members. A larger and more detailed document is available for viewing. Please contact Derry Armstrong, Wayne Crocker or Don regarding this detailed document.

The draft Upper Clearwater/Ram Forest Land Use Zone Trail Plan 2008 was distributed to the members. At the previous standing and steering committee meetings, comments were brought forward and a draft plan was assembled. For additional comments, please forward to Derry.

The following comments were brought forward regarding the draft plan:

- 2.0 Desired Future Condition: this defines the future intent of what we want to accomplish not what is being accomplished. It was questioned if the word "safe" was creating an illusion.
- 3.0 Existing Conditions: this is the heart of the document. Some priorities were set to determine work to be completed and projects that are a priority. It was recommended to initially focus on trails that receive the most use and are in the poorest condition. It was recommended if working in a specific area, it is more cost-effective regarding equipment and materials to complete work on all trails in this area at the same time.
- 4.0 Recommended Actions: working collectively achieves more, but a detailed assessment of all trail segments is required. When describing maintenance, this refers to work that does not require equipment but rather (eg) repairing a small hole on a trail or removing a fallen tree. The steering committee recommended inspection reports maintained on an on-going basis, and Derry recommended a five-year maintenance cycle. The creation of a standard inspection form was recommended. The steering committee discussed volunteer trail stewards wearing apparel to indentify their stewardship and their involvement in trail and sign inspections, assisting users, distributing garbage bags and giving trail directions. Commercial equestrian users should be asked to completed more trail maintenance; Derry will adjust the draft document to indicate equestrian trail maintenance is currently occurring and will be encouraged to expand.

It was commented that nature is changing the landscape, water courses are re-routing and groundwater is more noticeable.

- Trail Design Guidelines: users need to know who is working on the trails and what is expected in regards to work. Derry recommended that the guidelines from the Alberta Recreation Corridor and Trails Classification document be adopted. Clarification is required regarding the words “*unsurfaced*” and “*natural*.” It was noted that the Department does not want to lose the trail maintenance previously completed. The type of user experience must be considered.
- 4.5 Inventory of Non-Traditional Trails: require an inventory of these trails and the types of users on these trails.
- 4.6 Fish and Wildlife Assessments: consider the location of the trail and if it requires being moved as the current location may be in a sensitive area (eg)creek crossing, riparian area.
- 4.7 Information and Signs: Derry asked the members to consider this topic and bring their recommendations forward for a decision at the next meeting.

It was asked if there is information the public can access regarding current trail conditions and wildlife concerns. The Bighorn Backcountry website is updated with this information.

For the next year, trail planning will include the following areas:

- Bighorn Dam;
- Crescent Falls;
- Tershishner Creek, and
- Nordegg.

As trail maintenance is completed, it requires protection. In the Kiska/Willson Forest Land Use Zone, a forest guardian will work with a stewardship volunteer to inventory the trails and this information will be compared with the Bighorn Backcountry map. The Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan will be reviewed and compared with the Kiska/Willson Forest Land Use Zone map. Currently, issues of different users on the same trails inside the Hamlet of Nordegg are a safety concern.

In the Hummingbird area, trails that are one to two hours from the forest recreation area require work. It was asked if equestrian users could complete some of this required work.

Stewardship Meeting Summary

A volunteer stewardship meeting was held in May for those individuals and organizations who maintain trails and staging areas. Distributed to the members were volunteer crests and letter of appreciation. All members gave a summary of their trail maintenance efforts and both the successes and difficulties regarding these trails. Currently, the Department is using the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) trail building guide and is working towards a manual of trail construction guidelines.

As not all trail stewards have formally signed an *Adopt-A-Trail* agreement, some stewards may have missed at this meeting. Please forward this trail and staging area volunteer information to Yvette Choma.

Miscellaneous & Open Floor

The Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan is posted on the government website. The Bighorn Backcountry is within the area of this plan. Trail data is constantly updated and stored in Rocky Mountain House, with future trail information to be updated and maintained.

In respect to prescribed fires, the precipitation is hampering efforts. Completed prescribed fires include the areas of Forty Mile and Idlewilde. The Hummingbird and Brazeau areas are scheduled for this year. The North Saskatchewan area west of Kootenay Plains will be re-evaluated due to the precipitation.

Members were asked to submit photos of the Bighorn Backcountry for use on the website. Photos must be taken within the boundaries of the website, and a Department model release forms were distributed. Please forward any photos to Yvette Choma. Photos can include plants, animals, users, stewardship, scenery, etc.

The Red Deer Sportsman Show was held in March, with an attendance of 13,000 people. This booth was shared with staff from Fisheries Branch of the Fish & Wildlife Division, enabling fisheries questions to be directed to this staff. Safety at Work, Home & Play day was held in June at the Rocky Mountain House Arena. School classes were organized to tour the booths at scheduled times, and the general public visited throughout the day.

The five-year review terms of reference is nearly completed. Currently being reviewed are the recommendations from the original Bighorn Backcountry Advisory Committee and current status of goals. Recommendations for new trail openings will be reviewed during this process.

It was questioned the use of off-highway and snow vehicles on the trail at the same time, as snow ruts are a problem. The Alberta Snowmobile Association and the Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association require an agreement regarding this matter and can bring this agreement to the Department.

South Ram Lookout area is currently being used for overnight camping. It was asked if this area can be designated for day-use only. Services would be required including hitching rails, fire rings, parking area for off-highway vehicles, backcountry toilet and signs. This would provide a day use and parking area for people to then proceed by foot. This request will proceed and be evaluated.

The Bighorn Backcountry field day will be August 20, 2008. Members will meet at the Department warehouse in Rocky Mountain House and carpool to the Bighorn Dam area. The tour of this area will be with off-highway vehicles.

The Bighorn Backcountry Standing Committee meeting will be November 5, 2008 at the Rocky Mountain House Super 8 Motel.