

Bighorn Backcountry Access Management Plan

Monitoring: Standing Committee

Meeting Summary

June 2, 2004

Rocky Mountain House Museum

In Attendance

Jack Walker	Calvin Rakach	Jeff Wilson	Bob Haagsma
Deb Schroderous	James Brady	Ken Zelt	Lorne Hindbo
Dennis Schafer	Clarence Stewart	Bob Long	Kristin McKenzie
Yvette Choma	Don Livingston	Derry Armstrong	Lisa Block
Grant Sprague	Gary Mandrusiak		

Chairperson

Butch Shenfield

Regrets

Greg Mallo	Richard Smith	Rob Hunter	Bonnie Brewer
Rick Artzen	Derek Durocher	Philip Lacerte	Jimmy Wildman
Cheri Adolph	Ken Schroderous	Nathan Moore	R.W. (Bobby) Turner
Mike Adolph	Christie Clark	Norman McCallum	Loyal Ma
Doug Ritchie			

Introduction

Butch Shenfield thanked everyone for attending the meeting. Wildfire Prevention Officer Gary Mandrusiak was introduced to the group. Gary is the most-recent member of the Steering Committee, representing Forest Protection Division. Grant Sprague, legal counsel for Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, was introduced to the group. Grant is in attendance to answer questions regarding the liability of public use and development or maintenance in the Bighorn Backcountry.

Due to possible employment conflict of interest, Richard Smith is unable to remain as the Eco-Tourism Representative. Eco-Tourism Alternate Jeff Wilson will replace Richard Smith as the representative. **ACTION:** Local eco-tourism outfitters will be contacted regarding the vacant position of Eco-Tourism Alternate. Any recommendations for this position may be brought forward to Alberta Sustainable Resource Development.

Activities, Enforcement and Signing

Prior to the Easter weekend, the Clearwater and Skeleton Creek Trails and Scalp Creek Random Sledding Area were closed to off-highway and snow vehicle use due to poor trail conditions. However, some motorized vehicle use continued on this trail, resulting in trail damage. **ACTION:** Monitoring plots will be established to measure the damage and any future trail maintenance that may be required.

During the May long-weekend in the Clearwater Area, nearly 4700 people were checked by Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and Alberta Community Development staff. This figure was down from 2003, possibly due to the poor weekend weather in 2004. It was suggested a type of handle-bar flag be given to individuals who have received a check of their off-highway vehicle, so time could be better-utilized with un-checked off-highway vehicles.

ACTION: Due to vandalism and blowdown, some signs may require replacing or re-installation. Some signs may require re-wording.

Due to poor snow conditions, no permits were issued for snow-vehicle use on the new trail that follows the Ya Ha Tinda Ranch into the Scalp Creek Natural Area.

ACTION: A better sign will be posted to indicate the trail closure dates on this trail.

All trail counters excluding one have had their data gathered. Trail conditions did not permit the final counter to be accessed. All previous, new and future trail counter information is and will be posted on the Bighorn Backcountry website. The past winter season's poor snow conditions indicated a decline in snow vehicle use, but many ice climbers. There was concern regarding a potential parking area near the Cline River to accommodate vehicle parking, as many climbers park on the highway shoulder. It was confirmed with Alberta Transportation that a parking area could receive snow removal. **ACTION:** Sustainable Resource Development will discuss with Alberta Transportation the construction of a parking area to receive snow removal.

Steering Committee member Ron Taylor is no longer with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. Until this position is filled, Don Livingston will be fulfilling these duties.

Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area

The Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area Concept Plan (May 2004) was distributed to all members. At the Standing Committee meeting of November 26, 2003, the concept plan was endorsed by the Standing Committee members. Two items of concern were noted:

- Under *Wildlife Corridor*, the word "shall" was changed to the word "may" in regards to the potential closure of the western portion of the valley due to critical wildlife periods.
- Under *Boundary*, it is noted the boundary expansion is not intended to prohibit hunting activity within the valley.

Campsites will be developed at the following three sites:

- Site A;
- Site B, for tents and smaller units, and
- Hummingbird Falls area will be re-developed.

Friends of the Eastern Slopes has arranged for three toilet facilities to be installed on June 4, 2004. To date, the following organizations have contributed or promised funds to the development and maintenance of facilities at the Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area:

- Friends of the Eastern Slopes Association;
- Caroline Snowmobile Association;
- Bowden and District Light Horse Association;
- Olds Snowmobile Club;
- Alberta Equestrian Federation;
- Bighorn Heritage ATV Society;
- Clearwater County.

Grant applications have been requested by Friends of the Eastern Slopes to assist in the costs of these facilities. Signs will be posted in the forest recreation areas, indicating facilities and future maintenance are provided by donations and volunteer work. Any changes to this sign can be made in the future, with approval from Sustainable Resource Development. Trail etiquette and environmental guidelines and rules pertaining to the Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area were discussed, based on the suggestion of Friends of the Eastern Slopes. Standing Committee members are asked to forward their recommendations for etiquette guidelines for the Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area.

ACTION: It was suggested the parking curbs could be removed on this date, as heavy equipment will be at the location. **ACTION:** It was recommended that signs be installed that indicate trees will be removed for site construction and toilet installation.

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development met with the Alberta Equestrian Federation regarding the request for an equestrian-only area. An equestrian-only area will not be legislated, but services will be provided to encourage equestrian use in specific areas. The Alberta Equestrian Federation has allocated funds towards equestrian services within the Hummingbird Forest Recreation Area.

Other groups, including school groups and youth groups, require work projects to complete certain levels of achievement within their programs. These groups may be of assistance to current work projects, and may be recommended the Bighorn Backcountry for work projects.

It was questioned how the contribution of funds, heavy equipment, and manual labor would be recognized. Signs, information in brochures, a donation vault, and pre-printed organization registrations and donations envelopes were suggested.

ACTION: Alberta Sustainable Resource Development will develop a plan to track all contributions, with user groups forwarding this information. In regards to financial, equipment and man-hour work donations towards services and maintenance, it was agreed that Friends of the Eastern Slopes will act as a central receiver and coordinator.

It was suggested that pre-printed envelopes for donations and memberships to organizations be located near a donation vault in a weather-protected display, for public accessibility. **ACTION:** A kiosk will be required for a weather-protected display, and some thought will be required regarding the design of the display.

ACTION: A donation vault site will be reviewed while on site June 4, 2004.

ACTION: The Standing Committee members will decide the person or organization that will collect envelopes from the donation vault, if a vault is installed.

Alberta Economic Development and Clearwater County are currently completing recreation surveys for the Bighorn Backcountry and surrounding areas.

ACTION: The final report from Clearwater County will be distributed to Standing Committee user groups upon completion. Concern was expressed regarding the regulations of Alberta Community Development Provincial Recreation Areas that are in close vicinity to established random camping areas.

Liability of working on crown land or participating in the Adopt-A-Trail process was discussed. When working on crown land, it is required to have on-site written permission from Alberta Sustainable Resource Development outlining the work being completed and the necessary paperwork detailing approval. To protect their workers, organizations and individuals are responsible for their own liability insurance and should inquire with their insurance company and obtain the appropriate coverage required for their group or personal policy. If an organization or individual is a part of the Adopt-A-Trail program or has assisted in working on crown land, there is the possibility they may be viewed as liable and included in a lawsuit. The government does not insure volunteers.

However, most suits focus on the government, as the owner of the land. Donations by individuals or organizations towards service or maintenance does not, in and of itself, result in liability for those individuals and organizations.

Eagle Creek Forest Recreation Area

The Draft Eagle Creek Forest Recreation Area Concept Plan was distributed at the previous Standing Committee meeting. Recommendations for this concept plan were brought forward. **ACTION:** Alberta Sustainable Resource Development to meet with Forest Protection Division regarding the existing windrows and if burning is an option.

ACTION: A sign indicating Panther Corners Forest Land Use Zone is required.

The Draft Eagle Creek Forest Recreation Area Concept Plan was accepted by the Standing Committee members present at the meeting. **ACTION:** Derry Armstrong will complete modifications to the concept plan and map, with a final copy to be distributed to all Standing and Steering Committee members.

New Forest Recreation Area Concept Plans for 2004

Upcoming concept plans include the following forest recreation areas:

- Cutoff Creek Forest Recreation Area;
- Blackstone Gap Forest Recreation Area, and
- Crescent Falls Forest Recreation Area.

The Standing Committee members recommend Cutoff Creek and Blackstone Gap Forest Recreation Areas as a first priority, with Crescent Falls Forest Recreation Area as a second priority.

Derry Armstrong will meet with interested commercial trail riding operators, outfitters, forest management area holder and selected Standing Committee members regarding the Cutoff Creek Forest Recreation Areas. Derry will also meet with interested commercial trail riding operators, outfitters and selected Standing Committee members regarding the Blackstone Gap Forest Recreation Area. Derry will meet with selected Standing Committee members regarding Crescent Falls Forest Recreation Area. Standing Committee members are to contact Derry if they wish to meet regarding specific forest recreation areas. When future field inspections are completed, individuals will bring forward to all Standing Committee members any recommendations.

Trade Fairs

A Bighorn Backcountry booth was placed at the Red Deer and Sundre Sportsman Shows, and the Innisfail and Rocky Mountain House Trade Fairs. Overall, the sportsman shows appeared to have a greater impact for the Bighorn Backcountry booth.

Organizations wanting Bighorn Backcountry brochures for upcoming trade fairs are asked to contact Yvette Choma.

Geographical Name Changes

At the previous Standing Committee meeting, two geographical names were identified as being inappropriate to the native people. Alberta Sustainable Resource Development has directed the geographical name change, process and contact person to the Standing Committee member.

Standing Committee members are asked to consider and bring forward any recommendations for unnamed trails and areas within forest recreation areas.

Forest Protection Division

Wildlife Prevention Officer Gary Mandrusiak discussed the potential wildfire threats in the Bighorn Backcountry. When determining wildfire threats, four factors are taken into consideration:

- fire behavior potential;
- fire occurrence risk;
- values at risk, and
- suppression capability.

The following were identified as possible considerations for Forest Protection Division when developing forest recreation areas:

- fire ring design;
- educational material with a prevention message;
- water sources, and small equipment of commercial operators;
- fuel reduction modifications in and adjacent to populated areas;
- safety zones;
- a possible fire prevention plan, and
- a vegetative management/fuel reduction plan.

The next Standing Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, September 9, 2004. All Steering Committee members will be invited to attend this meeting.