

**BIGHORN BACKCOUNTRY  
STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING**



**APRIL 11, 2024**

**9:00AM – 12:00PM**

**In Person Meeting**

## MEETING SUMMARY

Brad Jones	Dominik Kmet	Troy Dezall	Rod Burns
Julia Wachowski	Lorne Hindbo	Blake Christianson	Dale Marshall
Curtis Nichol	Travis Earl	Michael Doyle	Suzanne Comfort
Grant Santo	Loyal Ma	Dennis Schafer	Doug King
Alex Miller-Tait	Phil Lacerte	Garett Schmidt	Simon Dyer
Stephen Shenfield	Marla Zapach	Chiarastella Feder	Neil Ratcliffe
Amanda Halawell	Devon Earl	Hans Van Vlaanderen	Amanda Soppit
Laura Raivio			

Item #	TOPIC
1.	<p><u>Introduction/round table</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alan Ernst stepping down as Eco-Tourism rep on the standing committee.</li> <li>- Mark Handel coming in as timber/fire rep on the steering committee.</li> </ul>
2.	<p><u>Nordegg Trail Plan</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- See attached presentation for information, click on sticky note icon to view comments for each slide.</li> <li>- Draft plan is now in place and was sent to the committee ahead of this meeting for review. Looking for any concerns or red flags, things we did not consider.</li> <li>- Municipal boundaries are not within the scope of this plan.</li> </ul> <p><u>Q&amp;A / Comments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Only motorized road in the Black Mountain area would be for shuttle use? Yes, on-highway vehicles only.</li> <li>- Is the camping area at the Bighorn Dam inside the planning boundary? East side of the dam in the trail planning area. Not Tershishner.</li> <li>- Possible connector to the trunk road? It is within the scope of the plan.</li> <li>- Could we fix Joyce Creek? When inspected, Joyce Creek trail has 20-30 watercourse crossings and 2013 flood damage, not good. There is a feasible opportunity for a new trail, but it has sheep and goat range. Looked at the reroute from the air and saw only one creek crossing. When given the conversation around intent for connection of Bighorn Dam camping to Nordegg it was determined more than the Nordegg sub-committee should tackle. Very expensive and stayed in the long-term planning bucket.</li> <li>- Feeling that now is the time to do these items as there is currently money being put towards recreation.</li> <li>- There has been a pattern of less and less OHV trails and it takes away from recreational value. Recreation is not going to not exist. Trails to tie into the community have some merit and would bring socio economic value. Having county, provincial and municipal on board allows for more than one input. Comes down to Nordegg, do they want it? Helps to</li> </ul>

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	<p>manage the recreation when you have meaningful trail access.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Get residents around Nordegg behind the planning, which they seem to be right now. Debated within the Nordegg subcommittee and came back to having high value trails. If the motorized community are coming into Nordegg, are they wanting rail trail experience, Nordegg south, Bighorn Dam? Where do we invest for where are they wanting to go. Look to providing experience and infrastructure.</li> <li>- Need a critical mass of trails for any group, cycling, hiking, OHVs, horses. If you are going for a week, you want the trails there together.</li> <li>- OHV group volunteers are not giving up. All the repairs done in the past have been by volunteers. Prior to 2018 some funding was provided to Bighorn Heritage ATV Society (BHAS). Everything else was out-of-pocket and volunteer time. In fairness it is only giving up using their own time and money to do it. The funding mechanism in the Trails Act has allowed us to look at maintenance again. Not giving up. Just not using our own time and money.</li> <li>- More interested in a wildlife habitat logging project. A trail could be built to whatever specs to leave in the area and tie into Nordegg. Dense conifer forest, either will get logged or burn. Would like to see it managed so that it would benefit all of us. Joyce Creek trail needs to be replaced somewhere else.</li> <li>- Would a logging road be allowed to remain in the area? This is within the R11, outside of a timber company forest management area. When we discuss leaving roads, that would be a plan done by the government of Alberta (GOA) and a partnership with a company.</li> <li>- Example of existing road usage inside vs. outside of the PLUZ: Meadows area is outside of the PLUZ. Clearwater Trails Initiative (CTI) was able to go in and make the roads trails. Vast majority of the trails there were previous roads. If it is a short-term road, Forestry division is responsible. Long term disposition road comes to Lands division for approval. If it comes to a trail, it falls to the recreation team.</li> <li>- Trails require a myriad of approvals. Water, public lands, etc. and can be complicated on approval. Need to have the interest first and then all the other approvals need to take place. Trail needs to be in the right spot at the right time and right use.</li> <li>- The Nordegg plan is a much smaller issue, how to have the most impact at the lowest cost. Plan does not really reflect that much access leading from downtown Nordegg. If the GOA and Clearwater County could get together and build a staging area and kiosk to direct people from downtown. Somewhere they can see, information where to park, unload, access the trails. Staging is part of the trail system outside of the hamlet.</li> </ul>
3.	<p><u>Forestry Trunk Road/OHV Shared Usage</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Last meeting went over the proposal to allow OHV usage on 180 km of Highway 734. It was supported and approved to move forward. Working towards implementation. Much of the signage has been installed. Here to gather thoughts on what is needed for successful implementation. In conjunction with Forestry and Parks, Transportation will introduce publicly on July 1 weekend.</li> <li>- Working to ensure requirements to operate and public awareness.</li> </ul> <p><u>Q&amp;A / Comments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How are you going to assess the success, is there a timeframe? Typically, assessments occur seasonally. Go through the summer season and find out what the concerns are, and where. Review environmental impacts and enforcement concerns. Outside information from Forestry and Parks colleagues. Will be looking at transportation, public concerns, wear and tear on the highway, was the signage clear.</li> </ul>

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- Ram Falls up the hill near Hummingbird turnoff. Clarification for OHVs when going through the Provincial Park. There will be OHVs allowed on the trunk road and there is going to be a designated parking lot at Ram Falls. Just to that parking site only, not through the campground or anywhere else.
- How is increased usage, number of accidents, effect to responders, public safety access being addressed? Tried to tailor the conditions of operation in an attempt to have appropriate conditions. OHVs are to have visibility requirements and only speeds up to 50 km/hr (rules listed in the 2024 Bighorn Backcountry brochure).
- Concern over lack of mirror requirement.
- Addition of highway travel brings in other enforcement agencies.
- Provincial law doesn't require a helmet in a side x side if wearing a seatbelt. Any provision for putting helmet use as mandatory? In many municipal bylaws it is required. Provincial peace officers cannot enforce bylaws on a provincial highway.
- Severe dust issues. Idea to tweak management system by spraying becoming part of maintenance for dust suppression.
- Creating a lot of access into areas where there was not access before. Starting an assessment to look at topography and assess points on the road where OHVs may be drawn to go to. Working on that over next 6 months.

4. AWA's Bighorn Backcountry Report
- See attached report and presentation for parameters of assessment, results, detailed information.
  - Discussion of Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) results of a long-term monitoring study in the Bighorn Backcountry, Hummingbird area in particular. Looking at the landscape as a whole, not just recreation use.
- Q&A / Comments
- Banff trail/Ranger Creek would have been OHV usage prior to the start of monitoring in 2003, prior to the PLUZs being implemented. Any attempt to determine if erosion for present historically or after study started? They did record whether tire tracks or horse prints were observed at the beginning of the study and made an effort to figure out what kind of use caused the erosion. Over time observed if it was historic erosion or recreation based.
  - Regarding depth damage on the Canary creek towards the Ram River, GOA hardened that trail. Going north there was no money put into that section. When Bighorn Backcountry started the group had to put in a plan. If we want to keep these trails, we have to put in some money towards this damage.
  - OHV trails are multi-use trails, and then there is non-motorized. All activities on the landscape have an impact and requires the ability to maintain those structures. Prior to this, maintenance was provided by volunteers, but we now have some money to put towards the trails. May be taking a snapshot with some old data.
  - AWA not currently doing stewardship/maintenance on these trails. Advocating for sustainable management on the trails, both from an environmental perspective and a user perspective.
  - Is the AWA in support of trails in Hummingbird or do they want to see them removed from Hummingbird. Support rehabilitation? We feel there shouldn't be motorized in prime protection areas. We understand there are trails in prime protection and hope that this work and make these trails sustainable.
  - Does GOA have data for this area? Yes, do we need more signage and boots on the

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ground? Enforcement does not have counters there, but Forestry and Parks has for many years. Issues with small number of officers to cover enforcement. Signage is in place, rules on the map and online.

- Trappers have wider access and permits are issued to groups to do work off season. GOA going in off season on patrols. A portion of the compliance issue could actually be approved access.
- Disagreement with report on trail timing and usage and the statement that trails have become worse. Shown picture of trail work. Example of multi-use/wagon trail still intact and in good condition. Point taken and in response the theme remains we are moving forward. Not to be taken that the volunteer work is in vain or bad work.
- AWA does not want to dismiss anyone’s hard work to make these trails sustainable. Areas where they are on highly erodible soils, it does need a lot of funding and work and cannot be all on volunteers to do that. Understand frustration.
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**5. Trail Approval Process**

- Trails Act is here, we have legislation and regulation, but policy is not developed yet. Pressure to get a lot done. Missing business process on how to develop a trail; how to get from A-Z. Have been completing internally but need to discuss the process with stakeholders. Will develop a transparent and objective process for accepting trail proposals and making decisions on whether to advance into planning.

**Q&A / Comments**

- Scalp Creek/James Lake are example of closed trails on the map. If removed, they would be very difficult to put back on. If we leave them on, groups can work with them. We are looking for good sustainable trails.
- Not all land use designations are the same. In some places recreation value is higher on the scale than others. Lands Division process would depend on the land use designation? Yes, that would be the case. Lands Division is responsible for protected areas now as well.
- Suggested the reps would like to see us follow the Eastern Slopes Policy and the Integrated Resource Plans (IRP). They were supported by the public. We need to look at if we are wanting an OHV trail in prime protection and that is not the intent of the policies. The trail process stems from that concern, but we cannot just shut down access to OHVs. That is the reason a lot of these closed trails are still on the map. The values and IRPs are still very valid.
- The committee reviewed the Terms of Reference (TOR) just before COVID. Time that we revisit the TOR, as it feels our directive has changed. Its origins came from the access management plan. Maybe not as valid anymore.
- Biologist still use the old policies and guidelines. A road that goes through critical habitat for a short period of time is different than a year-round trail that has no predictability of users. Need to recognize the different impacts in a different way. Need more process and conditions directly applicable to recreation use.
- The plan from the 1980s was ahead of its time and took much into consideration. We haven’t kept up with size of OHVs projection, but fundamentals are still the same, just a little dated. North Saskatchewan Regional Plan not part of this mandate
- Question of discussing trails or bigger picture. If you don’t have the bigger picture, then you cannot talk about the trails.

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6.	<p><u>Open floor</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public Lands Camping Pass (PLCP) - still need to promote it on our areas where it is applicable. Have very finite resources who continue to do checks as well as educate and promote benefits to the landscape. Still fairly mixed reviews. Signage missing for education, would like to get electronic highway signs this year. Public are upset if they have paid, and neighbor has not. Who looks after the pass? It is on the RELM App. If it comes off your credit card automatically, auto renew has been chosen.</li> <li>- Nordegg Trail Society – thank you for the grant – invited to the AGM at the end of April at the community centre.</li> <li>- Friends Of Eastern Slopes Association – AGM is this weekend in Olds. Update - around the Panther Road trees were removed in the Red Deer River PRAs (north and south). Plans for gravel. Finished Panther PLRA, finished first stages at Bighorn Creek Campground. Obtaining fill for Eagle PLRA at Wild Horse Road. Eagle highlines completed. Extending sites and roads at Hummingbird. New toilets – 2 Hummingbird, 2 Eagle, 3-Peppers, 2-Elk, 1-Fish Pond, 7 Mile to come. Work on cabin at Eagle Creek PLRA.</li> </ul>
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8. **Next Bighorn Backcountry Standing Committee Meeting – TBA Fall 2024**

Action Items	Description	Assigned To:	Due Date
1.	Provide committee awareness of capital projects before work is being performed.	Brad Jones/Blake Christianson	ongoing
2.	Update on the Provincial Trails Act	Brad Jones	Fall 2024
3.	Send TOR and Access Management Plan, for review over summer.	Brad Jones/Laura Raivio	Spring 2024