



ALBERTA SNOWMOBILE ASSOCIATION
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PRESENTATION
BIG HORN COUNTRY
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The Alberta Snowmobile Association welcomes this opportunity to discuss and assist in establishing a realistic and operable management plan for the Big Horn. I submit information on "Snowmobiling Today" for your consideration and review. We believe that by using a proactive and balanced approach with educational programs and regulations, access management for all recreational activity, not just motorized, and sustainable infrastructure guidelines, many can still enjoy the Big Horn as we know it. We look forward to offering our input into some of the detailed management plans.

The association offers these comments and agree in principal with the establishment of new management guidelines. It is our intention to work towards continued snowmobile access in Big Horn.

Pertaining to the recreational access questionnaire and the off-highway vehicle questionnaire:

1. Legislation/Prime Protection:

- a. The Forest Land Use Zone designation seems to be the appropriate legislative to use at the present time dependant upon the Legislative Review Committee results*.
- b. We believe that environmental protection and recreation planning does not necessarily require a "Park" designation.
- c. The Off Highway Vehicle Act also legislates snowmobile use, machine requirements, noise and emissions regulations.
- d. The Eastern Slopes policy and the Wildland Park designation recognizes snowmobiling use and allows access to the Prime Protection Zone.
- e. Nordegg-Red Deer River Sub-Regional Integrated Resource Plan also addressed key wildlife areas and have already restricted snowmobile use significantly.

* Legislative issues related to provincial recreation corridors will be the focus of an MLA review committee appointed by Community Development Minister Gene

Zwozdesky. The committee will complete a legislative review of existing legislation related to trails and recreation in Alberta and other provinces, listen to the concerns of individuals and organizations through public consultation this spring, and make recommendations that will address issues.

The expected outcome of the review is new legislation governing recreational trails and amendments to some of the existing 20 provincial acts related to trails.

2. User Fees: Through an agreement with the local snowmobile club, use of trail passes could be administered and regulated at the trailhead for snowmobile use under certain conditions. Liability issues would have to be addressed to establish responsibility.

Presently, the snowmobile trail maintenance and grooming programs are supported through the ASA Seasonal Trail Pass or Day Pass program to support the ASA managed trail system within Alberta. Over \$100,000 annually is directed to trail initiatives throughout the province. Further trail funding from the ASA is also available when criteria is met and Provincial Grants are also available for some trail needs through the clubs.

3. Adopt a Trail: Signage for snowmobile trails could be applied for through the local ASA snowmobile clubs. The association can assist with national snowmobiling-accepted signage and grooming guidelines. The association would also be willing to discuss partnering in an educational program.

The use of two-way designated and possibly groomed trails with sizable destination open areas strategically along the trail and at the end of the trail is often adequate for a pleasurable day of snowmobiling. Looped trails are often effective. Many snowmobilers enjoy long distance destination riding and regularly travel over 100 km per day.

There are many successful snowmobile trail systems in Alberta and we would request being involved in developing the details of a realistic and workable management plan for snowmobiling as well as in any assessment work which may result in future changes to this plan. This would include a review with the stakeholder before internal arbitrary steps for closure are decided upon. An appeal process could also be implemented.

4. Multi-Use Trails: The association looks forward to keeping communication open and working in a respectful manner with other user groups to develop a positive and workable access plan. Multi-use is a term we emphasize, however, "Snowmobile" use is unique in its own right and is often not compatible with other activities due to issues dealing with safety, maintenance of the trail and snow levels. Snowmobiling is permitted in prime protection under the Eastern Slopes policy and is approved in a variety of different areas including "Wildland Parks", therefore, having a seasonal snowmobile management plan is essential, and appropriate restrictions considered during the winter. This would address snow

cover and the maintenance of the trail, safety, sensitive areas and factual wildlife issues. Rerouting a trail, if necessary, may be possible. Normal snowmobile noise levels and snowmobile use do not affect wildlife in any major way.

Sensitive areas have previously been identified under the Forest Land Use Zones, wilderness areas, ecological and natural reserves when approximately 60% of the Big Horn riding area was closed to snowmobiles. A further 10% was lost through gazetting and closing additional access to areas. Now, a best guesstimate, a further 50% is under threat of closure. This is unacceptable to the snowmobile community. We have compensated significantly in the past. We do not consider total closure of areas a management plan, but a movement by "perception" rather than by "fact".

Restriction does not mean banning of a recreational use and we would appreciate further consideration at the distances and locations of the winter trails. We all need to be involved in a proactive process that deals with the issues and management mechanisms.

5. OHV Use in Prime Protection: Designation of the trails, proper management for winter and summer activities and finding an opportune and time-oriented window to keep the trails open with minimal impact should be considered. If there were insufficient snow cover for snowmobiles, alternative uses could be considered before thaw.

Nowhere in Canada where snowmobile trails are managed and maintained by snowmobile clubs are there other vehicles allowed during the snowmobile season. This mostly is because of user pay systems, maintenance, insurance, degradation of the snow pack and disturbance of the grooming results. Some lands may not be passable in the warmer months due to private land and leased land issues or water content of the land.

Pilot Project: A review of the management plan or a pilot project would require a significant amount of time, perhaps 5 years, in order to set the program in motion and do assessments.

6. Damage: Stakeholder consultation and open communication throughout the process would be required before closure was initiated. Steps to rectify the issues should be part of the solution before closure.

Wildlife: If we look at other mountainous areas we discover that with proper seasonal management, low and high altitudes can be accessible to snowmobiles and have little or no impact. Much appreciated new environmentally friendly technologies are also being applied to snowmobiles.

7. Penalties: A penalty system in sensitive areas is one way to deter people

from going off trail, however, enforcement would be required. Whatever the dollar value of the penalty, it should be appropriate for the offence. Education and signage programs should also be part of this program. West Yellowstone has designated trails throughout the park and “no one” leaves the trail. Alberta Snowmobile Association has “Stay on the Trail” signage for private lands or for areas we require restrictions. Most respect the directive.

10. Crime Watch - Snowmobile Trail Officer Patrol: This program could be initiated with the assistance of government. Trail Officers are trained and often volunteer to patrol the trails. They mostly deal generally with safe riding (speed, alcohol, licensing) etc. but can deal with other issues. They have the ability to ticket.

After the association has had a chance to perform a detailed review of the proposed maps, a further submission shall be made.

Should you have any questions on our presentation or within our “Snowmobiling Today” submission, I would be pleased to answer them at your convenience.

Attachment: Policy Statements
Big Horn Country – Snowmobiling Today

In “A Policy for Resource Management of the Eastern Slopes 1984” it states: “Prime Protection Zone: Future access or utility corridors may be required through this zone. Approved snowmobile trails may also cross this zone.”

1. Objectives for Each Resource Sector – Recreation:
 - a. Remote Camping – to increase the number of camping sites accessible on foot, by horse, and by off-highway vehicle.
 - b. Trails – Land Based – to increase the number of kilometers of long distance trails in the region for hiking, skiing, horse-riding and OHV use.
 - c. Tourism – to encourage the development of tourism opportunities and services capable of operation on a year-round basis.
 - to ensure the provision of an adequate land base for tourism activities while maintaining high aesthetic quality and thus maintaining the value of the tourism experience.

2. Table of Comparable Activities by Land Use Zone
 - a. These activities are only representative of a range of activities that occur in the Eastern Slopes. No consideration was given to winter use snowmobiling as an activity.
 - b. Since economic opportunities are not all known in advance, site-specific developments may be considered in any zone.

In “Nordegg-Red Deer River Sub-Regional Integrated Resource Plan: Approved by the Economic Planning Committee of Cabinet on March 4, 1986”

1. Preface: This plan has no legal status and is subject to revisions or review at the discretion of the Minister of Forestry.
2. Highlight Summary: The planning area can be broadly divided in two on the basis of resource management intent:
 - a. The more mountainous western part has a protection and recreation emphasis, providing opportunities for watershed, wildlife, fisheries and both extensive and intensive recreation. Industrial and commercial development will continue to be largely constrained throughout this area. In addition, the plan proposes controls on motorized back-country access in those areas where such access is causing terrain damage, wildlife harassment and/or conflict with other recreational users.
 - b. The remaining, foothills part has a multiple use emphasis, with elements of both protection and development. Opportunities for timber, oil and gas, mining, grazing, recreation and tourism development are identified. At the same time, this area can provide significant wildlife, fisheries, recreation and other benefits. Management of motorized recreational access is proposed through a program of designated vehicle routes in conflict areas.”

Public comments have been received on a full spectrum of issues addressed in the plan and are generally positive. The overwhelming concern has been the limitation of back-country motorized access; with strong opinions expressed both for and against plan proposals. The majority of the area proposed for vehicle restrictions are now designed as Forest Land Use Zones under the Forest Act-, implementing this aspect of the plan on a trail basis until November 1986.

In “Nordegg-Red Deer River Sub-Regional Integrated Resource Plan: Plan Implementation July 1987”

1. 3.2.2 Access Management – to provide access control into portions of the mountainous RMAs, as noted in the Nordegg-Red Deer River I.R.P., regulated mainly through the designation of Forest Land Use Zones (F.L.U.Z.) and Forest Recreation Trails. The F.L.U.Z. and Trail regulations will address both motorized and non-motorized access and will provide restrictions in accordance with the environmental concerns being dealt with. An industrial Access Plan will be required in RMA should one or more operators become active within the unit.

2. 3.2.3 Fish and Wildlife Division – Access Management – to develop means of regulating motorized access in key wildlife habitats in order to reduce harassment and range loss. The ultimate objectives of access management are firstly, the enhancement of populations of elk, moose, bighorn sheep and grizzly bear, and secondly, retention of areas capable of providing hunting, fishing and non-consumptive wildlife use experiences in a wildland setting. Access management in the most westerly RMAs of the plan will be achieved through a system of Forest Land Use Zones. Access on public lands in the central and eastern portions of the planning area is proposed to be managed through a system of “Designated Vehicle Routes” once the concept has been tested in another planning area.