

bighorn advisory group

March 2002

Public Discussion Paper and Questionnaire

Bighorn Access Management Plan

off-highway vehicle (OHV) access

Purpose of this Paper

A map illustrating OHV trails accompanies this discussion paper

The Bighorn Advisory Group has been asked to examine whether off-highway vehicle (OHV) use in the area is compatible with environmental protection and other allowable uses. This discussion paper describes the issues that have been raised and potential measures to address these issues in the future. Please read the paper and provide your responses on the attached questionnaire.

Why is OHV access being considered in the Bighorn?

Current policy (Integrated Resource Plans created in the 1980s) indicates that OHV use should be restricted in most areas of the Bighorn (see attached map). The use of OHVs has grown considerably since the policy was created. Many Albertans expect to be able to access this scenic area on OHVs. Current policy suggests that OHV use may be allowed on designated trails, where the use is "compatible with the intention of the zone."

Government staff and users in the area have noted that OHV use is occurring in portions of the area and there are situations in which OHV use has been detrimental to the vegetation and wildlife of the area. The Advisory Group agrees that OHV access must change in the future, but disagree about the extent of restrictions that should be placed on OHV access. Some members believe that responsible OHV users could access designated areas within the Bighorn and play a positive role in supporting environmental protection and human safety within those areas. Others believe that OHV access is incompatible with the requirement for environmental protection.

Issues such as camping, trail use and wildlife conflicts are also addressed in the "recreation access discussion paper." Please refer to both to be sure all your issues and concerns are being addressed.

What policy guidelines affect decisions about where OHV access will be appropriate?

The integrated resource plan for the area describes the following intentions for zones within the Bighorn:

Prime Protection Zone (e.g. Upper Ram, Cline River, Upper Clearwater FLUZ, Panther Corners) – To preserve environmentally sensitive terrain and valuable aesthetic resources.

Critical Wildlife Zone (e.g. Blackstone-Wapiabi FLUZ) – To protect specific fish and wildlife populations by protecting aquatic and terrestrial habitat that is essential to the maintenance of those populations.

Special Use Zone – To recognize historical resources, scientific research areas and lands which have unique management requirements, legislative status or which cannot be accommodated elsewhere.

General Recreation Zone – To retain a variety of natural environments to serve as a focus for a wide range of outdoor recreational activities.

Multiple Use Zone (e.g. Kiska-Wilson area near Forestry Trunk Road) – To provide for the management and development of the full range of available resources, while meeting long term objectives for watershed management and environmental protection.

Facility Zone – To recognize existing or approved settlement and commercial development areas.

Is a complete ban of OHV use in the area being considered?

No. Most Advisory Group members believe that summer and winter OHV use can occur on designated trails in the multiple use zone. This zone includes the Kiska Wilson planning area (see map). As well, a slight majority of Advisory Group members believe that snowmobile use can occur on limited designated trails in the prime protection zone on frozen ground. However, a slight minority of Advisory Group members think that OHV access can be allowed in the prime protection zone when the ground is not frozen.

Why is winter access treated differently than summer access?

When there is snow on the ground, snowmobiles can travel across the area causing little or no terrain damage. There is less wildlife active in the area that will be affected. Wildlife biologists can map sensitive winter habitats and plan trails so that snowmobile use does not affect these areas. There are also fewer human users in the Bighorn during winter months and therefore less potential for conflicts between users.

What basic regulations are currently used to manage OHV use?

The following regulations are currently in place:

1. *The Forests Act/Forest Recreation Regulation*: Every person who is within a forest land use zone, forest recreation area or on a forest recreation trail shall comply with (a) the lawful orders and instructions of a forest officer, and (b) the instructions, prohibitions and directions contained in signs and notices posted on or about the forest land use zone, forest recreation area or forest recreation trail. AR 343/79 s8
2. *The Forests Act/Forest Recreation Regulation*: The operation of a four-wheeled off-highway vehicle with a wheel base of 152.4 centimetres or less and equipped with tires with a tire pressure of 34.5 kPa or less is permitted within the Upper Clearwater River Forest Land Use Zone on trails that have been designated for that purpose by signs or notices posted in the Zone or in accordance with the written instructions of a forest officer. The following definitions apply:
 - "off-highway vehicle" means a motor vehicle used for cross-country travel on land or water but does not include snow vehicles or motor boats;
 - "snow vehicle" means a motor vehicle designed and equipped to be driven exclusively or chiefly on snow or ice or both; and
 - "forest land use zone" means an area of forest land declared by this Regulation to be a forest land use zone.
3. No off-highway vehicle shall be operated in a public place unless the off-highway vehicle is equipped with (a) one or 2 headlamps mounted on the front of the off-highway vehicle, and (b) at least one tail lamp mounted on the rear of the vehicle, which shall (i) display a red light only, and (ii) be visible from a distance of not less than 60 m from the rear of the vehicle. *OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE REGULATION*
4. 14(1) No person shall operate an off-highway vehicle that is not equipped with an exhaust muffler consisting of a series of pipes or chambers that ensures that the exhaust gases from the engine are cooled and expelled without excessive noise and without the emission of any flame or sparks. *OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE REGULATION*

What measures are being proposed to protect the Bighorn from damage from OHV use?

1. Identify major areas of the Bighorn as "no go" areas for OHVs because of concerns about wildlife, water and fisheries, terrain and sensitive habitats. Also impose timing restrictions to ensure that access is not allowed at times that could disrupt wildlife activities. Current critical wildlife habitat, and Fish and Wildlife referral maps will be used to determine this (see attached map).
 - Some designated trails will have timing closures to help minimize wildlife conflicts while still allowing access on the trail for a portion of the year. Some reasons for a timed closure would be lambing/calving times, winter and summer critical range protection, or hunting season.

- Some designated trails could be temporarily closed do to heavy rain or other environmental conditions.
2. Limit OHV access on frozen ground to designated trails and "frolic areas" noted on the attached map. Closely monitor use of these areas to ensure users are respecting access limitations, and that negative effects on wildlife, habitat and other users are minimal. Trails that pass through, or access important Sheep and ungulate winter range will be avoided. Current critical wildlife habitat, and Fish and Wildlife referral maps will be used to help determine which trails should be designated for use.
 - Compliance to designated trails will be done through a combination of government enforcement patrols and through a user reporting system similar to Report A Poacher or rural Crime Watch
 - Enforcement of violators will be done by staff from the departments of Sustainable Resource Development (SRD), and Community Development (CD).
 - The effects of motorised vehicles on wildlife and wildlife habitat will be monitored by biologists from Fish and Wildlife, SRD.
 - The effects of motorized vehicles on Water Resources and Aquatic Environment will be monitored by Alberta Environment staff.
 - Trails can be designated and enforced according to The Forest Act, Forest Recreation Regulation under the designation of Forest Land Use Zone (FLUZ).
 3. Limit OHV access on unfrozen ground to designated trails shown on the attached map, on a pilot basis only. Closely monitor these designated OHV routes for a trial period, and make decisions about continued (or expanded) access based upon the results. Current critical wildlife habitat, and Fish and Wildlife referral maps will be used to help determine which trails should be designated for use.
 - The effects of motorised vehicles on wildlife and wildlife habitat will be monitored by biologists from Fish and Wildlife, SRD.
 - The effects of motorized vehicles on Water Resources and Aquatic Environment will be monitored by Alberta Environment staff.
 - Trail conditions, soil erosion, vegetation, user conflicts, and other environmental conditions will be monitored by Land and Forest Division.
 - Trails can be designated and enforced according to The Forest Act, Forest Recreation Regulation under the designation of FLUZ. New FLUZ areas will need to be designated to provide the legislation to carry this out.

Bighorn Access Management Plan off-highway vehicle (OHV) access questionnaire

This questionnaire should be accompanied by a discussion paper and map providing background information about OHV use in the Bighorn.

The Bighorn Advisory Group has been asked to make recommendations about how to manage OHV activity. The following proposed measures are intended to improve environmental protection and reduce user conflicts.

Please give us your response to these proposed measures. Also feel free to provide any comments you wish.

Where indicated, please indicate your level of support for each proposed measure using the following scale:

- 5 = Very High Support
- 4 = Support
- 3 = On the Fence
- 2 = Low Support
- 1 = Very Low Support
- X = Not Enough Information

1a Do you plan to take OHVs into the Bighorn area in the future for your personal recreational enjoyment? NO YES

1b Do you plan to take OHVs into the Bighorn area in the future for research or business purposes? NO YES

Proposed Measures

Considerations

Your Level of Support

Your comments

2a Allow winter OHV use in the prime protection zone, only on designated trails where there are few concerns about disruption of wildlife.

Snowmobiles and soft wheel OHVs would be allowed on designated snow-covered trails.

- 5 Very High Support
- 4
- 3 On the Fence
- 2
- 1 Very Low Support
- Not enough information

2b Allow summer OHV use in the prime protection zone, only on designated trails where there are few concerns about disruption of wildlife.

OHVs would be allowed on properly hardened trails in areas where disruption to wildlife and vegetation is unlikely.

- 5 Very High Support
- 4
- 3 On the Fence
- 2
- 1 Very Low Support
- Not enough information

