

bighorn advisory group

March 2002

Public Discussion Paper and Questionnaire
Bighorn Access Management Plan

recreational access

Measures specific to OHV users and equestrian users are covered in separate discussion papers.

Purpose of this Paper

The Bighorn has become a destination for a growing number of recreational users. Increases in use over the past decade have caused concern about environmental damage, user conflicts, and congestion. The Bighorn Advisory Group is making recommendations about how these problems could be alleviated. This paper describes the measures being considered. Unless stated explicitly, these proposed measures would apply to both commercial and recreational activities. Your response to the attached questionnaire will help the Advisory Group determine which of these measures will be acceptable and effective.

What recreational access concerns are the Advisory Group aware of?

As the number of people participating in activities in the Bighorn has increased, the impacts on wildlife, the environment and the recreational experiences of others have also increased. The concerns that have been noted include the following:

- Random camping congestion (too many people trying to set up camps)
- "Homesteading" – some random campsites are left for much of the summer and include inappropriate amenities and create sense of ownership
- Need to protect historical and archaeological sites and culturally sensitive areas now, and in the future
- Cutting live trees for shelters and firewood
- Improper disposal of human waste resulting in water contamination and spoiling tenting sites
- Garbage and equipment left behind
- Congestion at camping spots forcing people into new areas
- Soil compaction, erosion, and destruction of vegetation at camping areas
- Stream bank damage and stream sedimentation from poor stream crossings
- Increased fishing pressure at high mountain lakes
- Increased damage to lake shorelines
- Improper food storage, resulting in bear problems
- Displacement of wildlife from important habitat
- Increased user/wildlife confrontations (both carnivores and ungulates)
- Increased trail damage by all users
- Mountain bike users causing off-trail erosion, and surprising equestrians and hikers during quick trail descents
- Stashing of equipment (future garbage) and food

What policy guidelines affect decisions about where equestrian 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.

What regulations currently manage hiking, mountain biking and backcountry camping?

The Forests Act/Forest Recreation Regulations:

No person shall permit his horse or a horse under his control to graze or be tethered within 100 metres of the shore of any lake in any of the Zones.

Every person who is within a forest land use zone, forest recreation area or on a forest recreation trail shall comply with the lawful orders and instructions of a forest officer, and 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

A forest officer may order a person in a forest land use zone to refrain from doing anything that, in the opinion of the forest officer, is dangerous to life or property or detrimental to the management or use of any road, trail or route within the zone. AR 108/99 s4

How can inappropriate recreational use be reduced?

The Advisory Group has noted that there is a lack of enforceable regulations to ensure appropriate access and use in the Bighorn. They are suggesting that appropriate legislative changes be considered to ensure that regulations can be established and enforced.

The Advisory Group has noted limited enforcement personnel in the area, and are therefore considering the use of significant fines, and the implementation of a "crime watch" program as deterrents to inappropriate use.

Who will improve and maintain trails and campgrounds?

Improvement and maintenance of trails and campgrounds in this area---to ensure continued recreational use and enjoyment---will require everyone's support. The Advisory Group is considering a program that will encourage user groups to adopt trails. In some cases, trails will be closed if no group is able to adopt and maintain them properly.

Trails must be available to all users, but the user group adopting a trail would work with government representatives to improve facilities and to educate users. There are already examples in the Bighorn of successful efforts that have resulted in private investment of dollars and person hours.

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

1. Require that all designated trails be sponsored by user organizations prepared to invest in materials and effort required to upgrade and harden off the trail, install proper signs, commit to continued maintenance, and help educate trail users about "minimal trace" use. This may include relocating portions of a trail to avoid soft areas and significant wildlife areas.
 - Trails showing damage or in need of maintenance will be required to be adopted by user organizations or will be closed for any use.
2. Require trail users to implement and self-manage a trail pass system, with the funds from trail passes being used to support maintenance of signs and trails.
 - This program must be established before the "pilot" period is over.
3. Implement a pilot period for all designated trails. Adjust regulations and guidelines based upon visual inspection of the trail, the users and complaints received at the end of the pilot period.

4. Establish high penalties for going off-trail or causing damage or human safety concerns. Implement a community crime prevention program to help detect violators.
- The proposed new penalties would give the officer two options, a specified payment or a penalty of up to a much higher amount through a court appearance.

Will trails in the Bighorn continue to be "multi-use" trails?

Yes. Most trails will continue to be "multi-use." However, in a few areas (e.g. Michelle Lake, Lake of the Falls), trails will be limited to hikers only because of the environmental conditions along these trails. Only designated trails would be able to OHV and equestrian users – see the papers entitled "OHV Access and Equestrian Access."

Will there be timing restrictions throughout the year when trails will be closed?

Some trails may be closed if the users could potentially interfere with wildlife at critical times of the year. An example of critical times would be during calving season or when sheep are lambing. In this case, trails that intersect active calving or lambing areas would be closed from April to June to protect the young animals.

Who will determine if future recreational use is causing unacceptable damage?

Government conservation officers, forest officers and biologists will monitor use and terrain in the area. If there are areas where there is unacceptable damage these areas could be closed temporarily or permanently to allow recovery. In areas where there are short term problems such as landslides, washouts or saturation of soils, trails could be closed for extended time periods to protect the area.

How will anyone know if these changes are effective?

All the changes will be subject to a pilot test period. A credible program of initial monitoring will be instituted to measure actual effects. If the proposed program is not effective, the government has the authority to close additional trails or camping areas or to make other changes as necessary.

How will random campers who access the area by motor vehicle be affected?

Congestion and inappropriate uses are becoming significant in some portions of the Bighorn where campers can access random sites by motor vehicle. It is proposed that regulations be adopted to limit the length of stay for any camper to 14 continuous days or less. Also proposed is a regulation to allow temporary closure of any random camping area or campsite where obvious environmental damage is observed.

How will backcountry campers be affected?

Some areas would be closed to backcountry camping because of damage to wildlife or vegetation. All backcountry campers would be required to practice "minimal trace" camping, carry out any garbage and properly dispose of human waste.

How will hikers and mountain bikers be affected?

Ideally, all users will show respect for other trail users. They will keep to marked trails and will demonstrate "minimal trace" camping practices. Regulations could be changed to allow future permanent or temporary closures where protection of wildlife habitat or water quality makes closure necessary.

It is proposed that backcountry camping be restricted to designated camping sites in some areas (especially in proximity to alpine lakes). Many camping areas will require backcountry toilets, since human waste disposal is a concern at camping areas within the backcountry. As part of an education process, users in the Bighorn will be given "Leave no Trace" information.

Will commercial users be affected?

Yes. Commercial users of the backcountry will be required to use designated campsites in areas where their activities have had significant impact. Commercial users may also be segregated from the general public. This may mean that a person who has traditionally camped in a specific site for commercial activity may have to establish a new camp with other commercial users in a designated site.

Will bear problems be addressed?

With more users in the backcountry, there are more confrontations with bears. It is proposed that food storage poles be established at popular backcountry campsites, and that backcountry campers be notified that it is a requirement to store food properly. Carrying of firearms as a means of backcountry defence is discouraged: pepper spray is preferable, and can be effective on bears. It is proposed that carrying of firearms be disallowed unless the firearm bearer has an active hunting license for the area and it is hunting season.

Will hunting and fishing be affected?

Hunting and fishing are major activities in the area, but both are already regulated activities—all people engaging in these sports must be informed of the regulations. This situation will not change: recreational hunting and fishing will continue to be guided by hunting and fishing regulations in the province. If biologists or conservation officers note changes in populations of fish or wildlife, there will be appropriate management measures to protect these populations from over-harvesting. In particular, there will be concern in the future if there is increased access to ungulates in the area that are not currently on the draw system. Hunters should note the proposed changes in equestrian rules and OHV rules in accompanying discussion papers.

Bighorn Access Management Plan recreational access questionnaire

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

Measures specific to OHV users and equestrian users are covered in separate questionnaires.

The Bighorn Advisory Group has been asked to make recommendations about how to manage hiding, mountain biking and backcountry camping.

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 access the Bighorn area in the future for your personal recreational enjoyment? NO YES

1b Do you plan to access the Bighorn area in the future as part of a commercial recreation venture? NO YES

Proposed Measures

2a Change legislation as necessary to ensure that there are enforceable regulations controlling recreational use throughout the Bighorn.

Inappropriate use could be controlled throughout the Bighorn. Currently, regulations in the Forest Land Use Zones greatly reduce inappropriate activity.

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

2b Implement a user fee.

User fees would be charged to support maintenance of signs and trails.

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

Considerations

Your Level of Support

Your comments

Proposed Measures		Considerations	Your Level of Support	Your comments
2c	Implement an "adoption" approach to improving trails and campgrounds.	User groups would be asked to "adopt" (care for and maintain) trails in many areas. In some cases, a trail may be closed if no group (e.g. OHV, equestrian, nature club, etc.) would "adopt" it.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 Very High Support <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 On the Fence <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Very Low Support <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough information	
2d	Implement a voluntary permit system.	Trail users would be asked to purchase trail permits. The funds would support trail maintenance.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 Very High Support <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 On the Fence <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Very Low Support <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough information	
2e	All trails in the Bighorn will be "multi-use" unless otherwise noted.	A few trails would be limited to some users, but the majority will be multi-use.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 Very High Support <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 On the Fence <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Very Low Support <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough information	
2f	Create a pilot program to monitor effect of major changes.	All changes would be reviewed after a pilot period. Further changes would result if damage to area persists.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 Very High Support <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 On the Fence <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Very Low Support <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough information	
2g	Area closures, temporarily or permanently, if damage is unacceptable.	Any trail or camp site could be closed in the future if there is documented unacceptable damage.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 Very High Support <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 On the Fence <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Very Low Support <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough information	

Proposed Measures		Considerations	Your Level of Support	Your comments
2h	Where required to protect the environment, backcountry camping will be restricted to designated sites.	Sites would be located in environmentally favourable locations. Some "favourite" sites may be off limits. If campsites are filled, overflow may not be allowed.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 Very High Support <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 On the Fence <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Very Low Support <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough information	
2i	Close camping areas near alpine lakes for one or more seasons to allow vegetation to recover.	All, or a portion, of some sites could be closed and unavailable for a period of time.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 Very High Support <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 On the Fence <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Very Low Support <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough information	
2j	Regulate users to ensure appropriate waste disposal and food storage to prevent attraction of bears and ungulates.	Many users will have to be given instructions about proper storage and disposal of waste. Campers leaving waste on the ground (not buried) could be charged with littering. Bear poles installation could be costly. Need to educate and inform users.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 Very High Support <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 On the Fence <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Very Low Support <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough information	
2k	Closing trails closed during critical times for wildlife (i.e. lambing or calving season).	Trails that intersect active calving or lambing areas may be closed to protect the young animals. All recreational users could be affected at certain times of the year (April-June).	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 Very High Support <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 On the Fence <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Very Low Support <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough information	
2l	Minimize recreation on sites and trails heavily used by ungulates (e.g. calving areas, feeding sites and mineral licks).	This may restrict access to some sites that may have been traditional favourites, at least during some seasonal time periods. Trails would be re-routed where long-term concerns are noted. Trails would be posted as "closed" during calving or other sensitive wildlife activities.	<input type="checkbox"/> 5 Very High Support <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 On the Fence <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Very Low Support <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough information	

Proposed Measures	Considerations	Your Level of Support	Your comments
<p>2m Restrict random camping to stays of 14 continuous days and regulate appropriate equipment and fixtures.</p>	<p>Will require education of users. Intention is to eliminate congestion, inappropriate use and "homesteading" (sense of ownership).</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> 5 Very High Support <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 On the Fence <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Very Low Support <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough information</p>	
<p>2n Require commercial users to use only sites designated for commercial use. Commercial users will be required to install approved backcountry toilets at all designated commercial user camping areas.</p>	<p>Access for commercial users would be more restricted. Additional expense for toilets will result in much better sanitation on site.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> 5 Very High Support <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 On the Fence <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Very Low Support <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough information</p>	
<p>2o Regulate backcountry users where necessary on how to protect themselves from wildlife encounters (e.g. firearm restrictions).</p>	<p>Encourage users to learn to use bear spray and other deterrents effectively. There may be a restriction on firearms. This would reduce the number of animals killed for "self defence."</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> 5 Very High Support <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 On the Fence <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Very Low Support <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough information</p>	
<p>2p Establish high penalties for going off-trail or causing damage or human safety concerns.</p>	<p>Conditions, penalties could be as high as 5,000 dollars. Could act as a deterrent to inappropriate use.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> 5 Very High Support <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 On the Fence <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Very Low Support <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough information</p>	
<p>2q Implement a community crime prevention program to help detect violators.</p>	<p>Could act as a deterrent to inappropriate use.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> 5 Very High Support <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 On the Fence <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Very Low Support <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough information</p>	

