



ILM Success Story: Ghost Stewardship Monitoring Group

The Ghost Stewardship Monitoring Group has been providing stewardship and planning advice in the Ghost Forest Land Use Zone since 2006. They are demonstrating what integrated land management is all about: working together to reduce impacts on public land for present and future generations. This means sharing the land, working together for future land uses, and building understanding through open discussion and collaboration.

What was the issue?

Nestled in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, the Ghost has been a popular local recreation destination for over fifty years, drawing young and old alike to experience the outdoors. As more Albertans continue to look for places near Calgary to recreate – especially for shorter day and weekend trips – conflicts between land users, public safety concerns and environmental impacts have increased.

Due to its long forestry and oil and gas history, the Ghost area is covered by a number of old seismic lines and resource roads. Since the 1970s, the Alberta government has invested in campgrounds, staging areas and some limited trail infrastructure in the Ghost. As more recreational users started discovering this area, they began using old access routes and creating new disturbances. This raised concerns as most of these routes were not ideally located or could not sustain off-highway vehicle use or random camping. With more users looking for different kinds of recreational experiences, the paths started to become more crowded. Environmental damage, illegal activities and conflicts in the area began to rise.

It was clear to the Alberta government and land users that a new approach was required, and quickly. If this area was to remain accessible and sustainable, the land users themselves would have to be part of the solution.

How was the issue managed?

In response, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development started to develop the Ghost-Waiparous Operational Access Management Plan in 2002. The plan was announced in 2005 and recommended that a Forest Land Use Zone be established for the area that had the regulatory authority to manage access. This would provide the tools to help ensure recreationists stayed on designated trails.

The Ghost Forest Land Use Zone was established in 2006. This action was taken to prevent further damage from what was seen to be a rapidly deteriorating situation.

The plan also called for a stewardship group to be established that would work collaboratively with government officials to:

- Improve public safety
- Ensure the sustainability of natural and aesthetic resources



- Promote cooperation and collaboration between recreational off-highway vehicle users and other users in the Ghost area
- Provide a range of meaningful opportunities for summer and winter recreational off-highway vehicle use in the Ghost

Who were the partners/collaborators for this project?

In the months that followed, a group of stewardship-focused individuals from local communities of interest agreed to participate. The Ghost Stewardship Monitoring Group comprises a variety of individuals that represent the knowledge and interests of:

- Industry
- cattle grazers
- motorized and non-motorized recreation
- the environment
- the local community

In the past, it was thought that these various land use interests had different goals for using the landscape and, therefore, could not work together. However, when the group was first formed in 2006, the members came together out of a common desire: to ensure that the Ghost could be accessed by all users during the summer and winter months for years to come. It was also important to the group that the character of the region be maintained.

During this process, the group has learned about each others' interests and what they desire – separately and collectively – for the future of the area. They learned that their interests are not that dissimilar, and that a desire for sustainable access and use actually unites them. Over time, the participants have gained respect for each other's points-of-view and opinions. Above all, they have learned to listen to each other and value their differences, discovering that common ground is possible.

By working together, the Ghost Stewardship Monitoring Group has developed a working Team Charter that defines the group's visions, goals, objectives, structures and governance rules. The charter was endorsed by all of the group's members on April 18, 2007.

Their primary goal is to make recommendations to Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) to improve the Ghost's designated trail system. The group is also active within the Ghost, spending hundreds of hours every year building and maintaining trails, building bridges and watercourse crossings in cooperation with many volunteer groups and SRD.

Group representatives and other volunteers have also recently taken courses in riparian area reclamation and sustainable trail development and maintenance to contribute to the group's efforts in the Ghost area.



What happens next?

Through the collective efforts of the Ghost Stewardship Monitoring Group, a new recreation footprint is emerging in the Ghost – one that protects sensitive terrain and other ecological values such as watershed, fisheries and wildlife. They are also embracing the Ghost-Waiparous Operational Access Management Plan's vision of building a world-class trail system that is designed for enjoyable recreation use.

By investing in the Ghost's trail system, the Ghost Stewardship Monitoring Group and the Alberta government believe that the recreational opportunities available in this area will begin to attract users from surrounding areas. With careful planning, as more people choose to make Forest Land Use Zones like the Ghost their recreation destination of choice, the recreational footprint across the foothills will also be lessened.

Today, members of the Ghost Stewardship Monitoring Group are very optimistic about the future. In just a few short years, they have seen the Ghost evolve from an area where conflicts between land users were frequent, to one that is starting to provide world-class recreational opportunities for present and future generations of Albertans. Ensuring that this work continues will require the willingness, expertise, commitment and participation of all Albertans, whether they are land users or managers. The Ghost Stewardship Monitoring Group is committed to fulfilling this vision and continuing to make a difference in the Ghost.