

## Access Management in the Bighorn Backcountry – Addressing Continual Change

As the population of Alberta continues to increase so do recreational pressures on Alberta's public land. One area feeling the increased pressure is the Bighorn Backcountry. It covers an area of over one million acres of public land along the south border of Jasper and eastern border of Banff National Park. This picturesque area had been experiencing damage to trail systems, campsites and riparian areas as well as negative impacts to fish and wildlife populations as a result of increasing recreational pressures and unsuccessfully managed access.

In 2000, Sustainable Resource Development invited stakeholders to participate in the development of an access management plan. The objective was to develop a plan that allowed different recreational users access to the area while maintaining the integrity of watersheds, fish and wildlife populations and the land. Stakeholders who accepted the invitation and became part of the Bighorn Standing Committee included:

- Alberta Energy
- Alberta Environment
- Alberta Tourism, Recreation and Parks
- Friends of the East Slopes
- Alberta Snowmobile Association
- Bighorn Heritage ATV Society
- Alberta Equestrian Federation
- Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association

Initial meetings were tense as considerable disagreement existed between the different user groups, especially between motorized and non-motorized users. Overtime, the different fractions were able to understand and appreciate the varying points of view. "It was rough at the start", says Don Livingston, Land Management Specialist with Sustainable Resource Development, "now there is trust and respect between members and this allows us to have open and honest discussions". This honesty allowed the group to move forward and collaboratively develop a plan to reduce their footprint on the landscape.

The committee was able to decrease the kilometres of un-sustainable trails by implementing an access management plan that was comprehensive, balanced and respected the desires of each user. As part of the plan, a trail inventory was conducted and a connected and sustainable trail system developed. Bridges were installed to prevent damage to creek beds and unsustainable trails were reclaimed. Sustainable camping and staging areas, able to accommodate additional users on a smaller land base, replaced poor or undesirable sites.

The Bighorn Standing Committee recognizes that their success is temporary. Recreational and access pressures in the Bighorn continue to grow and evolve. New partners will need to be included and plans will have to be adapted. Though the job will be made easier because the committee members have developed a stewardship ethic, have become collaborative and inclusive, and respect one another's views,