

TRAIL USE IN THE BOW VALLEY

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

BCEAG

1. Who is BCEAG and what is the relationship between the Bow Corridor Ecosystem Advisory Group (BCEAG), BCEAG's Recreational Opportunities Working Group (ROWG) and the partnering agencies?

BCEAG is a senior level advisory group formed to address development issues in the Bow Corridor. . BCEAG's partnering agencies include the Town of Canmore, Municipal District of Bighorn, Provincial Government, Banff National Park and Town of Banff . Working in a multi-jurisdictional partnership, BCEAG prepares integrated recommendations for consideration by the member agencies. ROWG is a working group of BCEAG, and as such, reports directly to BCEAG.

2. Is BCEAG a decision-making body?

No. Implementation of the recommendations generated by BCEAG is the responsibility of the partnering jurisdictions. The recommendations will not have statutory authority in any jurisdiction unless adopted under specific legislation. Partnering agencies may decide to work jointly where deemed beneficial.

3. Have the Human Use Guidelines been approved?

Yes. In August of 1999, the Guidelines were approved by Alberta Environment, the Town of Canmore (in principle) and the Municipal District of Bighorn. The acceptance and release of the document was advertised in the Canmore Leader on August 24th 1999. Copies of the report were available at numerous locations in Canmore, Exshaw, Banff and Calgary.

4. The Provincial Government has commenced implementation of trail closures and trail decommissioning without engaging in all of the educational opportunities set out in the Education and Implementation Guidelines. How does BCEAG intend to create goodwill among recreational users following these closures.

The Provincial Government and other BCEAG partners recognize that education and information related to implementation of the Human Use Guidelines has not been adequate to date. ROWG has been established to address the Education and Implementation Recommendations through the development of relationships and a consultative process with recreational users and other stakeholders. It is the hope of BCEAG members that the ROWG process will provide an

opportunity to follow through on a number of the recommendations outlined in the Education and Implementation Guidelines as well as develop some additional approaches to engaging and informing stakeholders.

Human Use Guidelines

5. What led to the establishment of the Bow Valley Wildland Park?

In 1997 A group of local Canmore residents submitted a proposal for a Wildland Park in the Bow Valley to the Alberta Special Places 2000 committee. Following this the Provincial Government invited a Local Coordinating Committee made up of a variety of interests including tourism, recreation, rock industry, environmental, and land development groups to review the proposal and make a recommendation. In making the recommendation for the new Bow Valley Wildland Park one of the key considerations of the Local Coordinating Committee was the need to protect important wildlife corridors and habitat patches as identified by BCEAG. A high level of public support for the recommendations of the Local Coordinating Committee led to the Provincial Government accepting the recommendations and proceeding with creation of the park in the fall of 1998

6. What role did biologists play in the Wildlife Corridor and Human Use Guidelines decision-making process?

Alberta Government wildlife biologists have been involved in both the identification of wildlife corridor and habitat patch locations and the recommendations for human use. In addition, external biologists from both Parks Canada and the private sector played a significant role, particularly with regard to the development of the Wildlife Corridor Guidelines.

7. What is the science behind the closures?

Scientific evidence has established that wildlife corridors are important to the continued survival of bears, cougars, and wolves in Alberta's Rocky Mountains. There is ample evidence from the literature of the displacement effect that high levels of human use have on some wildlife. Such displacement results from wary individuals or species choosing to avoid areas of high human use; increased mortality as a result of poaching, legal hunting, or native subsistence hunting; and displacement to less optimal habitats. Constant **disturbance** of wildlife by humans increases stress levels and increases energy expenditures of individuals which can have detrimental effects especially during high energy load seasons such as winter. Such redirection of vital energy requirements can have a negative impact of survival and future reproductive effort.

Increased contact with humans is directly linked to increased human/wildlife interactions and in the case of bears is directly linked to increased mortality (Weaver et al. 1986, Mattson 1993). In a recent study of habitat use by cougars, Jalkotzy et al. (1999) found that both male and female

cougars avoided areas of high human use and where human use levels exceeded 250-500 users/month, useful habitat for cougars could be alienated.

In Banff National Park where corridor restoration efforts have been implemented along the base of Cascade Mountain through the removal of several human facilities. Wildlife usage has exhibited a dramatic increase.

8. Why is there no mention of “displacement” of recreational uses in any of the BCEAG documents as a result of trail closures?

An important consideration by BCEAG during the development of the Human Use Guidelines and review of existing trail use was to ensure that a variety of trail opportunities throughout the valley were maintained. Although it was recognized that some displacement would occur the intent was to minimize displacement of use to other areas wherever possible. A number of compromises such as allowing trails to pass through selected portions of wildlife corridors, seasonal versus permanent closures and developing alternative trail routes were integrated into the Human Use Guidelines to ensure that recreational opportunities were maintained.

9. How will the seasonal and permanent closures in the bench lands area north of Canmore affect recreational users (particularly in the spring when these exposed trails dry out before others are available)?

Some popular trails such as the Benchlands trail above Silvertip and the Highline trail above the Alpine Club will be impacted by permanent or seasonal closures. In the bench lands area between the Burnco gravel pit and the Banff Park boundary approximately 130 km of existing informal trails have been identified on the BCEAG maps. Through the ROWG process BCEAG partners and stakeholder participants hope to identify new options that will allow trail connections to be maintained and early season opportunities to continue in the benchlands area while protecting the integrity of the wildlife corridors. .

10. The Education and Implementation Recommendations for Managing Human Use state the “area” has 504 kilometer’s of trails and only 40 kilometer’s will be affected by the Report’s recommendations. Has BCEAG ever produced a map showing 504 kilometer’s? What is the study area?

Yes. These maps were produced as part of the human use guidelines and they show all 500+ km of trails identified in 1998 / 99. More recent mapping using more accurate GPS technology and identifying new trails in the study area shows that there is now a total of over 700 km of trails, of which 2.6% (approx. 18 km)are recommended for permanent closure and 6.6% (approx. 46 km) are recommended for seasonal closure. This does not include approx. 22km of golf cart paths located in the valley This mapping is available and will be shared with all ROWG members. The “area” includes the Bow Valley from the East Banff park gates to the Kananaskis River.

Although not explicitly defined in the Guidelines for Human Use, Map #1 (from the aforementioned document) shows the area of the Bow Valley covered by the trail inventory.

11. Has BCEAG considered the cumulative effects of its recommendations?

Yes BCEAG members considered the cumulative effects of the recommendations and recognized that while some recreational activities would be impacted by these the benefits to wildlife would be significant. There are still approx. 700 km of accessible trails in the Bow Valley. Cumulative effects will continue to be considered through the ROWG process.

12. How were the Human Use Guidelines developed?

Recommendation criteria used in the development of the human use guidelines were primarily related to the size (width) of the corridor or habitat patch (area) as well as the seasonal sensitivity of the area from a wildlife perspective (i.e. calving for elk, lambing for sheep, winter range).

- In corridors deemed too narrow to accommodate both wildlife and human usage, permanent trail closures were recommended.
- Where multiple trails existed through corridors, some trails were recommended for closure with those left open being in locations least likely to have an impact on wildlife and leave the largest undisturbed land area for security.
- Many areas of the valley receive only seasonal use by wildlife and could be used by recreational users once they have been vacated for the season by wildlife. Based on these criteria, certain trails were recommended for closure only during the winter months while others would be closed only during sensitive times such as bighorn sheep lambing.

13. Do the trail closures Apply to All Users?

To date all closures and planned closures apply to all users.

14. Are trail users being unfairly targeted by the recommendations in the “Guidelines for Human use Within Wildlife Corridors and Habitat Patches” when intensive development and resource extraction are exempt from BCEAG recommendations? (e.g. How can trails be closed for wildlife protection reasons when some of these same trails run beside a large and intensive mining operation?)

It is the cumulative effect of all human activities (industrial, residential, commercial and recreation) that has created the situation in the Bow Valley requiring the protection of corridors and habitat patches for wildlife. All of these interests have, or are going to be, affected by the requirements to protect wildlife. At the present time, areas where dispersed trail recreation occur in the Bow Valley cover a larger land base than all other human activities combined. Resource Industries such as BURNCO have had their businesses significantly impacted by the need to

protect wildlife corridors. For example trails to the east of the Alpine Club are on lands that BURNCO was unable to develop due to the existence of an important wildlife corridor.

15. Why Are trail closures occurring in the Bow Valley?

In June 2001, Alberta Community Development staff began to implement closures of a small number of trails in the Bow Valley as recommended in the Bow Corridor Ecosystem Advisory Group (BCEAG) report Guidelines for Human Use Within Wildlife Corridors and Habitat Patches in the Bow Valley. The closures are being implemented to protect wildlife corridors and habitat patches on Provincial Crown lands within the Bow Valley.

16. Will the Alberta Government continue to implement trail closures or seasonal restrictions within defined wildlife corridors and habitat patches on provincial lands in the Bow Valley?

Existing permanent and seasonal trail closures put in place in 2001 will be maintained by Alberta Community Development. Any unauthorized development of new trails or structures that has occurred on crown lands will be closed or removed as they are discovered. The Alberta Government is committed to completing the implementation of the Human Use Guidelines but will not proceed with further closures outlined in the guidelines in 2002 while ROWG works towards improving the Education and Implementation process. _

17. What type of public consultation occurred during the development of the Human Use Guidelines?

The development of the guidelines and the decision to implement the recommendations were taken only after the government received public feedback through workshops and meetings with a variety of trail users and stakeholders. A series of workshops were held in June and October 1998 and an open house (121 attendees) was held in February 1999. In addition, over 50 written submissions were received following the open house. Participation in this process included representation from equestrian users, mountain bikers, hikers, climbers, hunters and others. The Provincial Government and other BCEAG partners recognize that education and information related to implementation of the Human Use Guidelines has not been adequate to date and has now undertaken this ROWG process to further involve public and stakeholders in trail planning.

18. From a wildlife perspective, what is the rationale for the December 1 to June 15 seasonal closures?

Seasonal closure dates are determined by biological requirements and behaviour of specific wildlife species. The dates identified correspond to the critical winter period for most species and are extended beyond the winter season to encompass the calving or lambing period. The targeted species are primarily elk and bighorn sheep and are dependent upon location. These are standard

dates used in dealing with industrial or commercial operations in an effort to reduce disturbance to wildlife during sensitive periods.

19. Is hunting still allowed in the areas that are being closed?

Within defined wildlife corridors no hunting will be allowed. Necessary changes to hunting regulations are being developed.

ROWG

20. Will the ROWG process recommend new trails be built in areas away from corridors and habitat patches to replace the closed trails?

Since the ROWG process is in its infancy, one cannot predict the outcome with certainty. However, one of the primary objectives of the ROWG is to identify both existing and potential recreational trail opportunities in the Bow Valley. Therefore, it is anticipated that this process will identify some areas where new trails could be developed.

21. Is ROWG dealing mainly with trails?

Yes. ROWG will be dealing primarily with trails. However other outdoor recreation activities that are impacted by trail use such as climbing, fishing and hunting will be part of any discussions.

22. Is wildlife protection the only issue being considered.

Although the perception by many is that wildlife protection is the only issue to be considered by ROWG, it is only one of many considerations. These include continuing to provide a range of opportunities for outdoor recreation, minimizing conflicts between trail users, minimizing soil erosion and protecting the integrity of protected areas in the Bow Valley.

23. Is additional public input proposed within the ROWG process?

Yes. For a more detailed description of the proposed public involvement process, please refer to the **ROWG Terms of Reference**.

Additional Questions

24. Will BCEAG's Education and Implementation Recommendations for Managing Human Use within Wildlife Corridors and Habitat Patches in the Bow Valley be noted in the Bow Valley Protected Areas Management Plan.

Yes, however because the management plan is presently undergoing review and has not yet been approved, the exact wording is unavailable at this time.

25. Are there any human use research and monitoring initiatives taking place in the Bow Valley near Canmore at present?

BCEAG identified the need for human use research and monitoring in 1999 in a report entitled "Wildlife and Human Use Monitoring Recommendations for the Bow Valley". Human use monitoring and research supported by the Town of Canmore and Alberta Community Development has been underway on trails in the Bow Valley since June 2000 and will be continuing for the next two years. An interim report on results of the monitoring will be available in December 2001. Updates have been provided to BCEAG on a regular basis.

26. What are the roles of the Town of Canmore, M.D. of Bighorn and the Province in the construction, management and closure of trails in the study area?

All of the ROWG study area lies within the municipal boundaries of the Town of Canmore and M.D. of Bighorn. The Town, M.D. and Province each have programs which plan for , construct and maintain trails within the study area.

The trails managed by the municipalities lie almost entirely within the developed portions of Canmore and the MD Hamlets and while a number of them can be used for both walking and bicycling, they are primarily designed for walking. Within the Town of Canmore new developments such as Eagle Terrace, Silvertip and Three Sisters are required by the Town to build multi-use trails across their private lands for public use.

Most of the lands within the Town of Canmore and the M.D. of Bighorn are owned by the Province. The majority of the 700+ km of trails in the ROWG study area exist on Provincial Crown land. Although these trails are within the boundaries of the Town of Canmore and the MD of Bighorn, and both municipalities are members of BCEAG and support the "Guidelines for Human Use", all of the authority for managing these trails and implementing the Guidelines on Crown lands lies with the Province.

27. Want more information or to get involved?

Interested individuals are urged to work through the respective group representative on ROWG (please see the following list of contacts). In addition, a series of community workshops/open houses have been proposed and will be advertised in the local media.

Mountain Biking Public - Ken Davies (678-9418)	Hiking/Walking Public – Doug Campbell (678-5551)
Climbing Public – Dan Verrall (678-6638)	Equestrian Public - Carole Stark (678-4823)
Cross-Country Skiing Public – Theresa Gawron (678-5268)	Conservation Representative – Jeff Gailus (609-6341)
Ecological Scientist – Danah Duke (220-8968)	Town of Canmore –Steve de Keijzer (678-1531)
Alberta Community Development – Steve Donelon (678-5508), Don Cockerton (297-5969)	Alberta Sustainable Resource Development – Jon Jorgenson (678-5508), Greg McAndrews (297-7622)
MD of Bighorn - Greg Birch (673-3611)	Banff National Park - Eva Katic (762-1517)
Melanie Watt - Biosphere Institute (678-3445)	Canmore/Kananaskis Chamber of Commerce - Rob Elliott (609-5549)
Megan Squires – Recreational Studies (286-3083)	