

# OFF HIGHWAY VEHICLE MASTER PLAN

November 2016



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals and groups gave of their time to inform the development of the Off Highway Vehicle Master Plan through workshops, open houses and interviews. In particular, The Planning Team received guidance, direction and support from a Steering Committee made up enthusiastic individuals dedicated to improving opportunities for OHV use in the Wood Buffalo area. These individuals were:

Gene Oullette	Wood Buffalo ATV Riders
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Your contributions have been greatly appreciated.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Off Highway Vehicle Master Plan has been prepared for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo to address off highway vehicle (OHV) use, issues and opportunities.

### Key Stakeholders

The Master Plan acknowledges and responds to the needs of stakeholders ranging from user groups to government agencies. Key user groups include the Wood Buffalo ATV Riders, McMurray Sno-Drifters Club and McMurray Dirt Riders Association - all active and well organized groups which are supported by their respective provincial associations. Local First Nations, Métis and trappers are also key stakeholders, as their traditional land uses are often directly threatened by OHV use and trespass.

Government agencies include the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) and the Government of Alberta. RMWB is responsible for trail planning and management, by-law enforcement, and communication, whereas the Government of Alberta (in the context of this plan) is concerned with the management of fish and wildlife, forest resources public lands, as well as recreational resources (e.g Provincial Parks). To this end, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) has a number of land use policies and frameworks which the Master Plan acknowledges may be valuable tools in the trail planning process.

### Environmental and Land Use Planning Context

The Master Plan recognizes a number of significant opportunities and constraints to trail development around Fort McMurray. Typical of a northern boreal forest, the landscape is characterized by extensive wetlands and muskeg, and is home to significant moose and caribou populations (ASRD).

From a land use perspective, residential development pressures within Fort McMurray are pushing future development into targeted Urban Growth areas located inside of a proposed ring road (RMWB). This future pattern threatens existing staging areas and provides a strong rationale for the relocation of trails well outside of the



### **Recommendations - Engineering New Trails**

- Initiate the development of new OHV trails and staging areas north and south of Fort McMurray.
- Develop comprehensive trail planning and design standards.
- Develop a comprehensive trail signage plan.
- Update Engineering Servicing Standards with improved access control measures.
- Continue to manage existing staging areas.
- Initiate a feasibility study to develop an OHV park / training facility.
- Explore potentials to collect fees for trail access and usage.
- Develop comprehensive maintenance procedures.

built-up area.

In terms of industrial development, most of the land outside of the community is under surface and /or subsurface lease, or within rights-of-way for power line and pipeline development. The experience of the Sno-Drifters Club demonstrates that there is a precedent for successfully coordinating trail construction with industrial development. Furthermore, the Master Plan recognizes the exceptional opportunity to incorporate trail development as part of end-use rehabilitation required of mine sites.

### **Existing Trails and Amenities**

The Master Plan acknowledges that there is a good network of trails, staging areas and other facilities upon which to build a first class trail network. In addition, there are trail connections further afield, with the Richardson Backcountry Area (100 km north) and Lakeland Provincial Park (300km south). South of Lakeland there are also significant trail connections with the Iron Horse Trail, Trans Canada Trail, and the Trans Canada Snowmobile Trail.

### **Engineering Safe, Fun and Sustainable OHV Facilities**

The development of safe, fun and sustainable facilities in the Wood Buffalo region is a prime focus of this exercise. The Master plan advocates a comprehensive process including conceptual planning through to detailed design and regulatory consultation to final regulatory application. A key component of this process is the identification and consultation with affected stakeholders and regulatory agencies. A key deliverable emerging in parallel with this planning process should be the preparation of standards for not only the design and maintenance of trails, but for the design of staging areas, access control measures, signage and on-trail amenities.

An exciting and unique opportunity identified in the Master Plan is the potential development of an OHV park, which serves both as a staging area and a day use recreational destination. OHV parks are even being developed with specific educational components, teaching safe and respectful riding along with environmental stewardship.



### **Recommendations - Education**

- Develop basic OHV user information resources.
- Ensure a web presence for key information related to OHV use and management.
- Establish a regularly produced, broadly distributed newsletter.
- Develop a formal program for community outreach RCMP / By-law.
- Advance the RMWB annual communication campaign.
- Develop a recognizable image or 'brand' for the Master Plan initiative.

A key objective of the Master Plan is to advance the potential development of OHV trails in the Fort McMurray area. To illustrate opportunities related to trail development in the region, options for potential trail development are identified in the Stony Mountain area, south of Highway 881, and north of Parson's Creek, west of Highway 63. These trails were intentionally sited close enough to Fort McMurray to allow for day use but still require trailering; the trails themselves were planned to be a minimum of 50km in length to allow full days of riding, and utilize stacked loops to minimize overall land footprint and incorporate a range of difficulty levels.

### **Educating Users and Communicating Key Messages**

The Master Plan acknowledges that in the Wood Buffalo region there are some very good educational resources being developed and delivered by a range of groups. The Plan also identifies a number of communications streams to be considered, ranging from trail development and management to enforcement to master plan development and implementation. It is critical that a comprehensive communications strategy be developed that ensures all of these streams are adequately addressed. This comprehensive strategy needs to recognize that some initiatives have taken place or are in development, such as maps, brochures and newsletters, and will fill an immediate need if resolved and implemented in a timely manner. Likewise, other corporate initiatives have begun and should be seen through to completion.

The comprehensive strategy should also engage various communications stakeholders working together in a collaborative manner. Furthermore, there is an important opportunity to strike new partnerships with allied groups, including Safe Communities Wood Buffalo, the Oil Sands Safety Association and Oil Sands Companies.

### **Creating Effective Enforcement Strategies for OHV Use**

Illegal OHV use in the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray is common and causes numerous complaints related to nuisance, property damage and personal injury. Existing municipal by-laws are generally appropriate, and the RMWB is committed to dialoguing with the community to ensure by-laws are understood and complied with.

The Master Plan recognizes that there is a need for RCMP and By-law to be active in the community, and to make minor amendments to existing by-laws as needed address local realities.



### **Recommendations - Enforcement**

- Update the current RMWB by-law 98 / 078 for the Urban Service area as appropriate.
- Initiate a trail by-law.
- Initiate a Trail Steward program.
- Actively work with Alberta SRD to ensure Backcountry Guardians monitor public areas in the region.

### **Recommendations - Evaluation**

- Establish a trail advisory group to assist with the management of OHV resources and the evaluation of the Master Plan.
- Establish a process to regularly review the Master Plan and its ongoing implementation.
- Ensure municipal processes, capacities and budgets facilitate the regular update of the Master Plan.

In anticipating the development of additional trails and the need for new by-laws, the Master Plan puts forward the concept of a Trail Steward program - a unique opportunity to provide 'soft' enforcement; e.g. modelling appropriate, behavior, assisting other users, etc.

### **Evaluating and Monitoring OHV Management**

While there are a number of groups doing good work developing and maintaining trails, this work is rarely undertaken in a collaborative manner. The Master Plan advocates the establishment of a trail advisory group, which brings together users and stakeholders in a supportive manner to undertake tasks such as trail management, communication, programming, strategic partnerships, as well as the ongoing evaluation of the master plan. There should be a special effort made to engage Alberta Sustainable Resource Development in the establishment of this group.

It is absolutely critical that the Master Plan undergoes regular review to ensure its vision, goals and objectives remain relevant to OHV users, key stakeholders and the public in the region. In this sense, the Master Plan must be considered as a living or 'evergreen' document by the RMWB, with mechanisms in place to solicit regular feedback.



## **PART ONE - INTRODUCTION**

*The Off Highway Vehicle Master Plan has been prepared for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo to address off highway vehicle use, issues and opportunities over the next ten years. The Plan seeks a positive and integrated approach to issues and opportunities associated with Off Highway Vehicles (OHVs), with a particular focus on All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) and snowmobiles. In addition to exploring and establishing recommendations related to effective enforcement and education initiatives, the plan focuses on trail planning and design considerations and illustrates a conceptual framework for trail development in the Fort McMurray region.*



## **PART TWO - BACKGROUND**

*A key component in the development of the Master Plan is gaining an understanding of the existing scene in the Fort McMurray area relative to OHV use and management. Specifically, research was collected on users, stakeholders and supports; the land use planning context and key regulators; existing trails and amenities; current educational initiatives; and current enforcement strategies.*

### **2.0 USERS AND STAKEHOLDERS**

A survey of users, stakeholders and supports was conducted in order to better understand the scope of issues and opportunities related to current OHV use in and around Fort McMurray. Key informants and stakeholders more specifically related to communication, education and enforcement are identified and discussed in those respective sections of the Master Plan.

#### **2.1 OHV USE IN WOOD BUFFALO**

In terms of OHV use in the Wood Buffalo region, the number of registered OHVs in 2008 was 6042, climbing to 6962 in 2009 (AIT, Alberta Vehicle Statistics). From discussions with user groups, it was understood that many households own multiple OHVs. Furthermore, from these discussions three significant subgroups of legitimate OHV users were identified:

- Extreme campers (e.g. access winter road / Richardson Backcountry)
- Fast riders
- Families / groups





In terms of demographic context, Fort McMurray is a young, transitory community, with 55% of the population male (2006 Census, RMWB). Anecdotally, this demographic accounts for a large percentage of OHV infractions.

## 2.2 USER GROUPS

A number of user groups have been established which work toward developing and improving OHV facilities in and around Fort McMurray.

### **Wood Buffalo ATV Riders Club**

The Wood Buffalo ATV Riders Club was established by and for the benefit of ATV users in the Wood Buffalo region. The club has developed and promotes a code of ethics related to safe ATV use and the respectful use of the land and resources. In addition, the club works to develop and expand trails and amenities in the region, and as such seeks to work with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development to this end. The club also hosts a web site to share information, its mission and code of ethics, and prepares a monthly newsletter.

### **McMurray Sno-Drifters Club**

McMurray Sno-Drifters Club has approximately 280 members at present, and at present maintains 216 kilometers of trails in the Fort McMurray area. These trails exist on the Athabasca / Clearwater Rivers (east to Whitemud Falls and camping areas) , from Waterways to Anzac and Stony Mountain, and west of Timberlea. The Sno-Drifters are active in trail development, working with the RMWB, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and oil sands companies to develop trails in the region. The group is active in safety training, having hosted avalanche training (in conjunction with the Canadian Avalanche Centre and Four Seasons Motorsports) in Fall 2008; SledSmart training (for 1500 students in local schools) also in Fall 2008; and a safe ride event (in partnership with RCMP and RWMB By-law) in March 2009. The group also operates a website which provides general club information, trail maps, and information on upcoming events in the region.



### **McMurray Dirt Riders Association**

McMurray Dirt Riders Association was established to represent dirt bikers, including competitive riders, in the Wood Buffalo region. The association has approximately 70 members at present, and operates a track facility south of Fort McMurray on Highway 63. The Dirt Riders host regular motocross (MX) races, including the annual provincial motocross racing series at this facility.

## **2.3 PROVINCIAL USER GROUPS**

Local groups work closely with their respective provincial organizations, which provide a valuable role providing information, coordinating and planning province-wide activities, and advocating the advancement of their respective groups and activities.

### **Alberta Snowmobile Association**

The Alberta Snowmobile Association (ASA) provides resources and shares information on existing trails and trail safety, and at the same time promotes events of interest to snowmobilers throughout Alberta. The association operates a website which communicates this information and provides a message board / forum for users. In terms of education and training, the ASA has developed and offers the Sled Smart education program and a Snowmobile Safety Course (developed in partnership with Portage College) for snowmobilers throughout the province.

### **Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association**

The Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association provides resources and shares information on existing trails and trail safety, promotes events of interest, and advocates safe and respectful OHV use by individuals and families. Information on topics such as trail safety, environmental protection and stewardship is shared through the association's website as well as a regularly produced 'Trail Talk' newsletter.



**Above**

Sample of RMWB access control measures

### **Alberta Dirt Riders Association**

The Alberta Dirt Riders Association represents off-road motorcycle clubs throughout Alberta. The association promotes a regular schedule of events including Motocross, Ice Racing, Hare Scramble, Cross County, Endurocross and Arenacross. In addition, the association provides information such as club information, racing registration, upcoming events and classifieds, through the association’s website.

### **Alberta TrailNet**

Alberta TrailNet is an advocacy group and information portal related to multi-use (e.g. both non-motorized and motorized) trails in Alberta. This information is shared through TrailNet’s website as well as the regular ‘Trail Tracker’ newsletter. Alberta TrailNet represents the Trans Canada Trail in Alberta and as such works with local communities and groups to establish trail networks and resources in the province.

## **2.4 OTHER KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND SUPPORTS**

### **Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) - Parks, Recreation and Culture**

Parks, Recreation and Culture is responsible for the delivery of leisure, recreation and cultural opportunities and programs within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

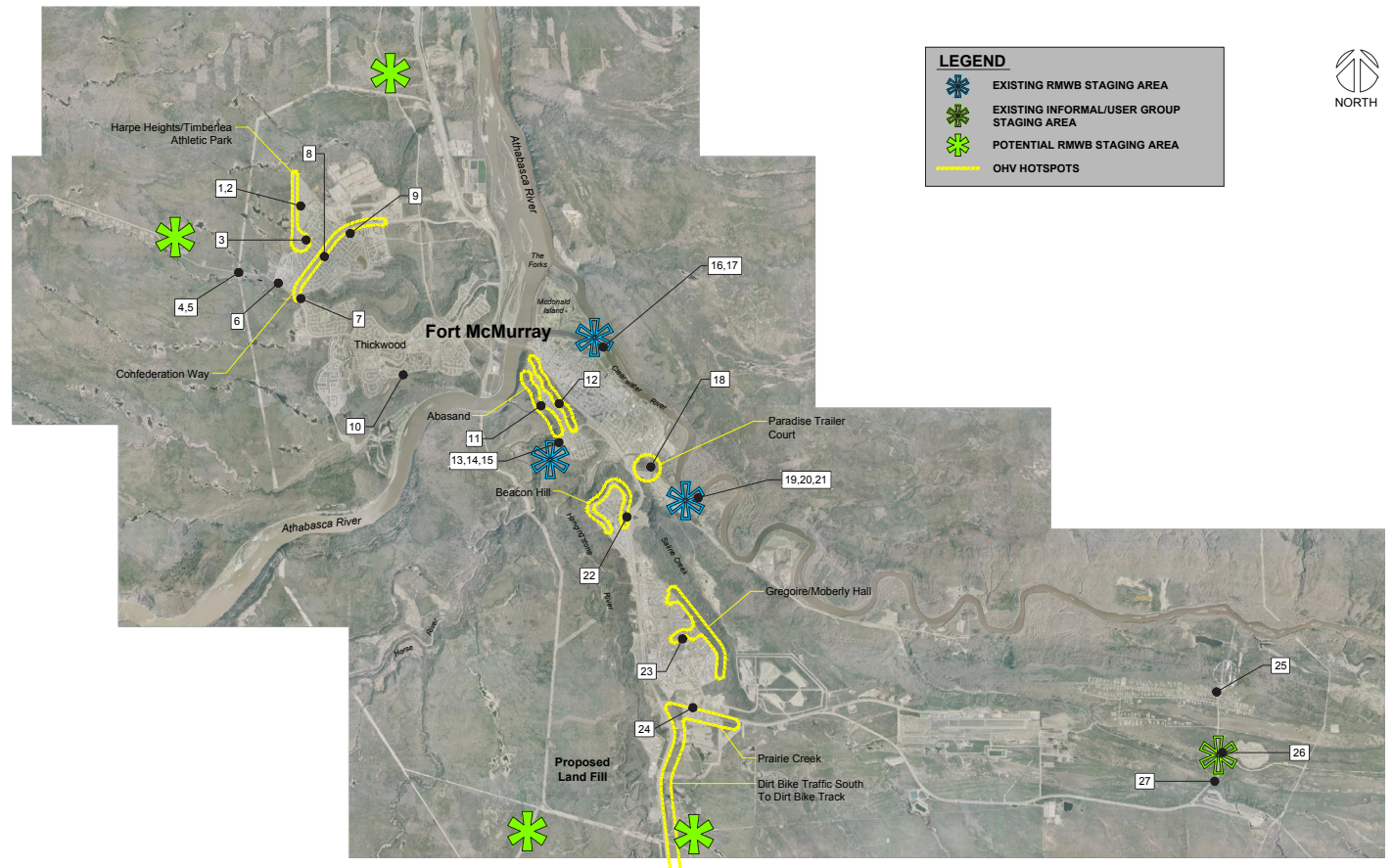
From a facilities perspective, the department is responsible for the planning, design and management of parks, open spaces and trails in both the Urban and Rural Service Areas of the Municipality. In terms of this Master Plan, RMWB Parks, Recreation and Culture has initiated this assignment; however, up to the present time the department has focused primarily on the development and management of non-motorized, multi-use trails within Fort McMurray. As such, the department has extensive knowledge and experience in trail maintenance, but at present does not have formalized maintenance standards and schedules. The department invests considerable time and finances in the construction, maintenance and repair of access control devices limiting OHV trespass on parks and other open spaces. As a result, the department has a wealth of understanding related to successful management



**Figure 1**

Existing Conditions, Fort McMurray Urban Service Area and immediate environs.

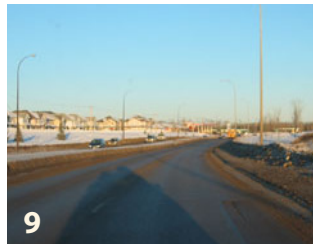
Photos on following pages.





**Existing Conditions Photos**

- 1 Harpe Heights berm
- 2 Harpe Heights PUL
- 3 Timberlea Athletic Park
- 4,5 Utility ROW west of Tower Road
- 5 Utility ROW west of Tower Road
- 6 Cartier Heights greenbelt
- 7,8,9 Confederation Way
- 10 Signal Road Greenbelt
- 11,12 Abasand Heights Greenbelt
- 13 Abasand Heights trail
- 14,15 Abasand Heights staging area
- 16 Signage, Morimoto Drive





LAND USE PLANNING / REGULATORY CONTEXT

**Existing Conditions Photos  
(continued)**

- 17 Snye Park
- 18 Paradise Trailer Court
- 19,20 Horse Pasture Park
- 21 Former railbed to Sapræ Creek
- 22 Beacon Hill greenbelt
- 23 Gregoire Park
- 24 Highway 69 at Prairie Creek
- 25 Sapræ Creek roadway
- 26 Sapræ Creek staging area
- 27 Former railbed





techniques, and is continually experimenting with new maintenance procedures and management strategies.

Parks, Recreation and Culture also delivers recreation and leisure programs to residents within the region. Furthermore, the department plays an important function coordinating the activities of groups with respect to the delivery of programs and opportunities.

#### **Fort McMurray Search and Rescue Society**

The Fort McMurray Search and Rescue Society is a volunteer organization which assists the local RCMP detachment and Regional Emergency Services with locating missing persons and attending to injuries, including those sustained by OHV users, within rural areas around Fort McMurray.

### **3.0 EXISTING TRAILS AND FACILITIES**

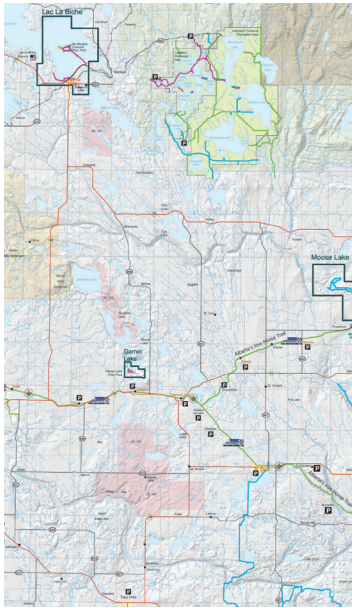
In and around the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray, OHV access includes a small number of staging areas, as well as a number of trails and facilities managed by local user groups. Beyond the immediate Fort McMurray setting, there are a number of significant regional trail networks, which offer the potential of future trail connections.

The provision and management of OHV trails and facilities must also include the consideration of effective access control, limiting OHV access to key points and protecting open space and trail assets and users.

#### **3.1 OHV STAGING AREAS**

Currently, there are a number of staging areas designated by the RMWB within in / straddling the Urban Service Area boundary. These include -

- **Abasand Heights** – Provides access to lands south of Fort McMurray between the Hangingstone and Horse Rivers. This site has recently been cleaned up, with derelict trailers and campers removed off-site. The facility is small, congested, and immediately adjacent to residential areas - posing challenges to the



**Above**

Regional trail networks, Northeastern Alberta

effective enforcement of existing By-laws (See 6.0).

- **Horse Pasture Park** (Waterways) – Provides access to former railbed southeast to Saprae Creek / Lynton. At present, the railbed is groomed for winter use by the Sno-Drifters.
- **Snye Park** – Provides access to the Clearwater River for snowmobilers in winter months. (Staging areas are illustrated in Figure 1.

Previously, a designated staging area had been in operation on Tower Road west of Timberlea, but this site was closed by ATCO electric. In addition, there are staging areas operated by the Sno-Drifters in the Saprae Creek and Anzac areas, for the use of snowmobilers in winter months.

### 3.2 ACCESS CONTROL

An important consideration in the management of OHV access and use, particularly in and adjacent to the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray, is the implementation of access control measures to protect park, open space and trail assets and users. Various access control measures have been used by the RMWB, with varying degrees of success.

In **park areas**, such as Syncrude Timberlea Athletic Park, post and rail fence is typically utilized along the site perimeter to prevent illegal trespass, with good results. At key access points, bollards are typically used (see below).

At **access points** to park spaces and trails (typically located within Public Utility Lots), a combination of bollards and / or fencing is typically used. The primary challenge with this type of control has been accommodating access by various means.

**Open space areas**, particularly along roadways and greenbelts, have been particularly difficult to effectively limit access control. Along roadways, the main challenge is to introduce access controls while respecting roadway design criteria (eg. clear zones). Along Highway 69 adjacent to Prairie Creek, the RMWB has introduced the random placement of Lock-Blocks to direct OHVs to the highway shoulders. Along greenbelts, such as those in Thickwood, Abasand and Beacon Hill, additional design challenges include the presence of trail users, and the sheer size /



visual ugliness of fencing.

### 3.3 OHV TRAILS AND FACILITIES

#### **McMurray Sno-Drifters Trails**

The Sno-Drifters presently maintain 216 km of trails both south and north of Fort McMurray. In the south, trails link Horse Pasture Park with Saprae Creek and Anzac on to lands around Maqua Lake in the Stony Mountain area. In the north, trails exist west of Timberlea, and are in development north of the community. The trails maintained by the club typically utilize pipeline and powerline rights of way.

The club has recently constructed a storage building near the airport which also serves as a staging area, and in addition maintains three warm-up shelters within their trail network.

#### **McMurray Dirt Riders Facility**

The McMurray Dirt Riders operate a track facility 5 km south of Fort McMurray. The 4 hectare site is used for regular motocross racing events, as well as provincial motocross events. The facility is not fenced, and in discussions with club representatives it was noted that there have previously been issues with vandalism on the site.

### 3.4 OTHER RECREATIONAL AMENITIES AND TRAILS

There are a number of other amenities and trails within the immediate vicinity of Fort McMurray which are worthy of identification to understand the context of recreational opportunities in the region. These amenities include -

- **Golden Eagle Resort** - private campground
- **Rotary Park** - campground and recreational facilities
- **Vista Ridge Recreational Area** - downhill skiing



**Figure 2**  
Existing Conditions, Fort McMurray and  
Saprae Creek north to Syncrude.

**LEGEND**

**General**

- Urban Service Area
- Airport / Airstrip
- Rivers
- Lakes

**Transportation and Infrastructure**

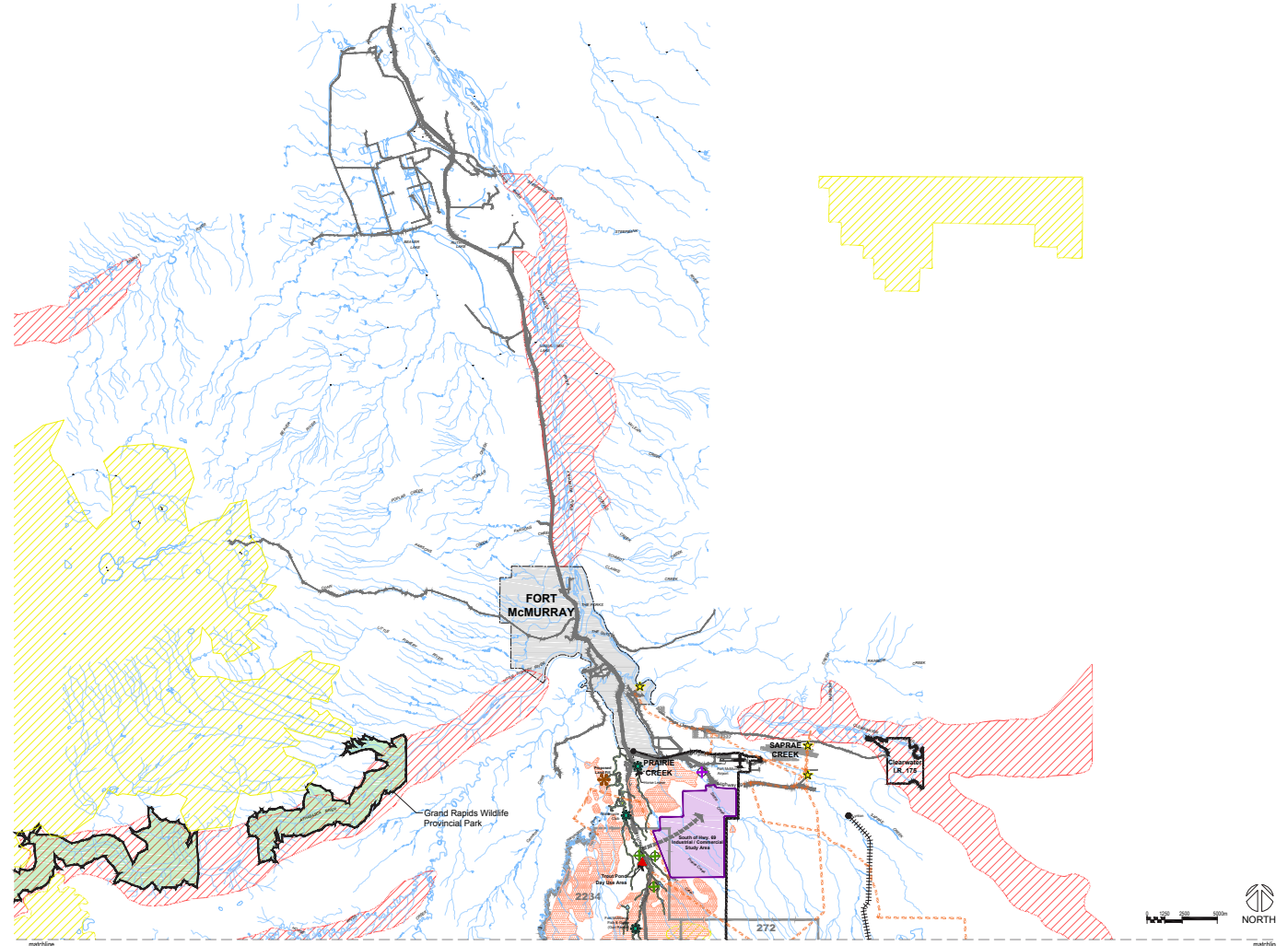
- Provincial Highway
- Unpaved Road
- Resource Road
- Bridge
- Athabasca Northern Railway
- Future Grade Separated Intersection Upgrade
- South East Regional Water Supply Line

**Natural Constraints**

- Muskeg
- Moose Corridor
- Caribou Corridor
- Environmental Protection

**Land Use**

- Existing Residential
- Existing Tourism / Recreation
- Existing Work Camp
- Existing Historic / Traditional Land Use Areas
- 272 Existing Fur Management Areas
- Existing Existing Snowmobile Trails
- Existing Staging Area





**Figure 3**  
Existing Conditions, Anzac and Stony Mountain region.

**LEGEND**

**General**

- Urban Service Area
- Airport / Airstrip
- Rivers
- Lakes

**Transportation and Infrastructure**

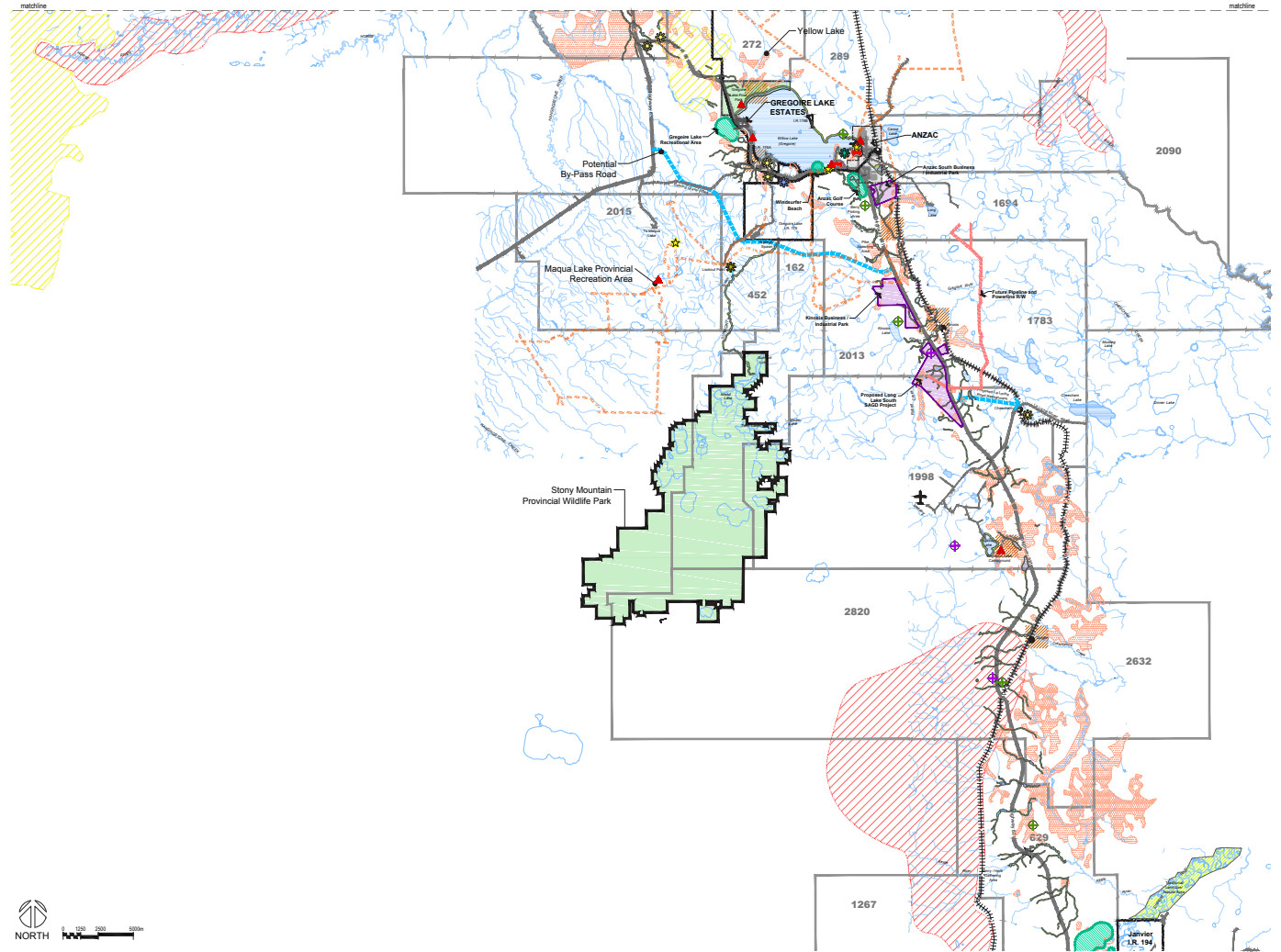
- Provincial Highway
- Unpaved Road
- Resource Road
- Bridge
- Potential By-pass / Road Realignment
- Athabasca Northern Railway
- Future Grade Separated Intersection Upgrade
- South East Regional Water Supply Line

**Natural Constraints**

- Muskeg
- Moose Corridor
- Caribou Corridor
- Environmental Protection

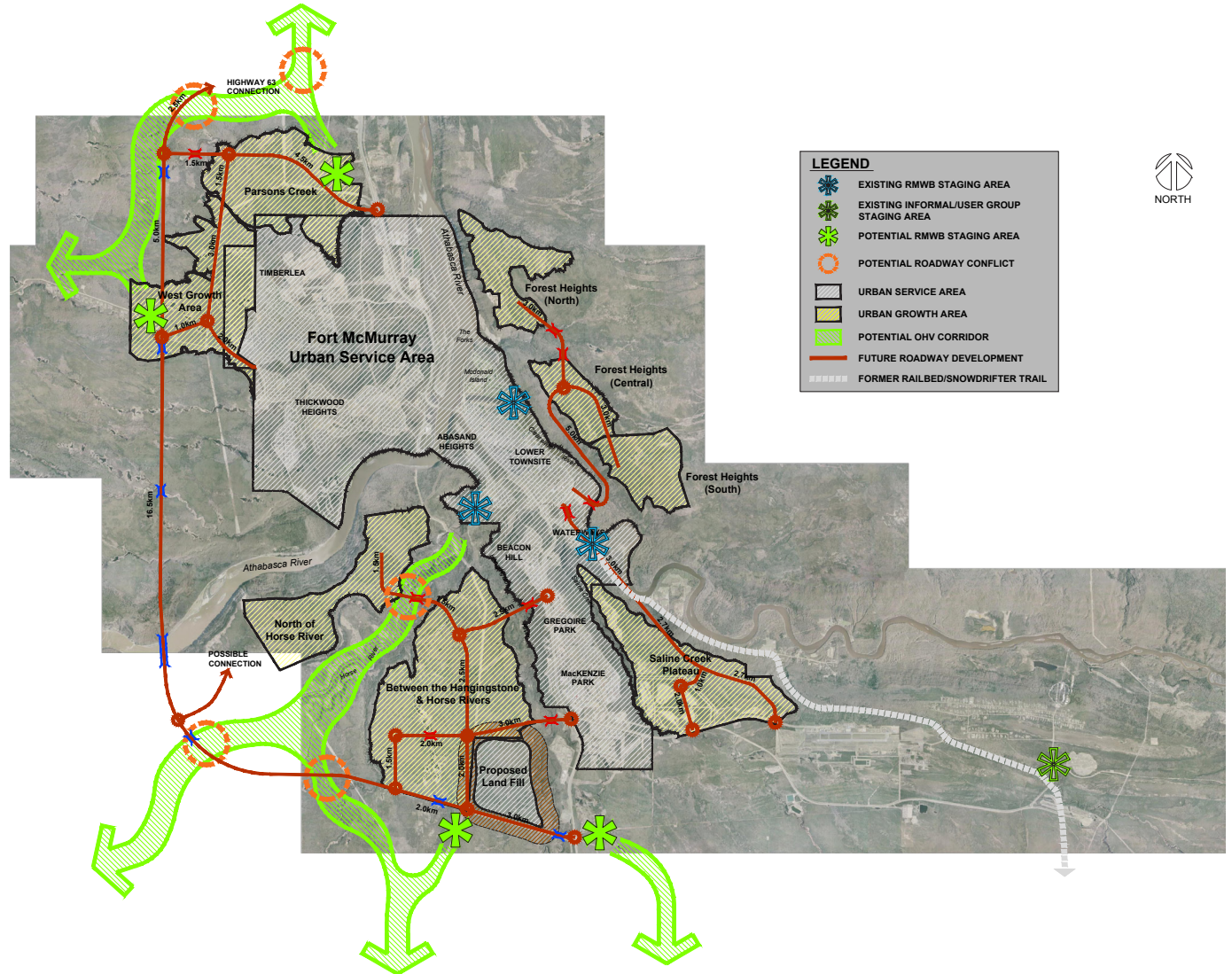
**Land Use**

- Historic / Archeological Resource Site
- Existing Residential
- Existing Tourism / Recreation
- Existing Institutional
- Existing Work Camp
- Existing Historic / Traditional Land Use Areas
- Existing Camp Sites
- Existing Day Use Area
- Existing Fur Management Areas
- Existing Existing Snowmobile Trails
- Existing Staging Area





**Figure 4**  
Land Use and Development Context,  
Fort McMurray Urban Service Area





- **Highway 63 fish ponds / day use area** –south of Fort McMurray on Highway 63.
- **Birchwood Trails** - over 30 km of non-motorized trails within Fort McMurray. These trails are commonly subject to trespass and damage by OHVs.
- **Gateway Hill** - multi use trails within a 100 hectare site north of Fort McMurray, accessed by the Wood Bison Trail. Gateway Hill is the result of rehabilitation efforts by Syncrude, and is the first oil sands site to receive official certification by the Province of Alberta.

### 3.4 REGIONAL TRAIL RESOURCES / OPPORTUNITIES

Northern Alberta is fortunate to have a multitude of multi-use trail networks. While a number of key trails are at present not easily accessible from Fort McMurray, their relative proximity hints at a future potential for connection to trails in the Wood Buffalo region.

#### **Richardson Backcountry Area**

The Richardson Backcountry Area includes over 600 000 ha of lands 100 km north of Fort McMurray. Richardson Backcountry is accessible by a three hour ATV ride and is a frequent destination for riders in the Fort McMurray area. The Richardson Backcountry is currently the subject of a study led by Alberta Sustainable Resource Development to determine the best management strategy for the area.

#### **Lakeland Provincial Park**

Lakeland Provincial Park (and Provincial Recreation Area) is located approximately 300km south of Fort McMurray, east of Lac la Biche. The Park and adjoining PRA have a total area approaching 60,000 square ha, and feature camping, boating, and a wide range of motorized and non-motorized trails. The park is well known for its trail offerings, including over 330 km of ATV trails and over 130 km of snowmobile trails.





### **Iron Horse Trail**

The Iron Horse Trail is a multi-use (non-motorized and motorized) trail converted from former railbed. The trail runs from Wasketnau (northeast of Edmonton) to Abilene Junction (northeast of Vegreville). At Abilene Junction, the trail splits into two legs - northeast to Cold Lake, and southeast to Lindbergh (north of Vermillion). The Iron Horse Trail is located only 30km south of Lakeland Provincial Park and Provincial Recreation Area.

### **Trans Canada Trail**

The Trans Canada Trail (TCT) is a multi-use trail network which stretches coast to coast and has a significant presence in Alberta. In Northeast Alberta, the TCT runs from Onion Lake west to Edmonton, north to Athabasca Landing and on to Peace River. The TCT includes part of the Iron Horse Trail. Additionally, the TCT includes a water route that extends from Athabasca to Fort McMurray and Fort Chipewyan.

The TCT is focused primarily on non-motorized travel. The TCT encourages snowmobiling in winter but does not endorse ATV use.

### **Trans Canada Snowmobile Trail**

The Trans Canada Snowmobile Trail was established by the Canadian Council of Snowmobile Associations in 1998. The trail runs independently, and at times in conjunction with, the Trans Canada Trail. In Northeast Alberta, the Trans Canada Snowmobile Trail runs from Cold Lake to Smoky Lake, then (via the Iron Horse Trail) to Athabasca.

## **4.0 LAND USE PLANNING AND REGULATORY CONTEXT**

An understanding of the land use context, frameworks and regulators is critical to better understand issues and opportunities related to OHV access and trail development in and around Fort McMurray.

### **4.1 ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT**



The area around Fort McMurray (Figures 2 + 3) is part of Central Mixedwood Forest region of Alberta, and as such is characterized by extensive wetland / muskeg / fen areas, luvisolic soils in upland areas and organic soils in poorly drained lowland sections. Tree species include aspen, white spruce and jack pine in upland areas, with black spruce common on low-lying areas. In terms of hydrology, surface waters include deeply incised river courses, lakes, and significant areas of poorly drained fens and muskeg. Significant moose and caribou habitat exist in the areas around Fort McMurray, and in these areas there are significant seasonal limitations to access and activity (ASRD).

## 4.2 LAND USE CONTEXT AND THE RMWB

### Residential Development

In the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray, future residential development is being directed to specific Urban Growth areas located inside of a proposed ring road (see Figure 4). This proposed pattern of development is articulated in the Fringe Area Development Plan (adopted by Regional Council in 2007). In discussions with RMWB staff, areas north of Parsons Creek, west of Tower Road and east of Saline Creek are likely to be developed first. Prior to the recent economic downturn, the timeframe for completion of these areas was envisioned as starting in 2011.

In terms of OHV trail access, the proposed development in the Saline Creek area may threaten existing OHV access out of Waterways via the former railway right-of-way. Over the longer term, development of areas west of the Hangingstone River may threaten OHV access out of Abasand Heights, and future development of a ring road may effectively eliminate OHV access out of Fort McMurray for all areas west of Highway 63.

In the Rural Service Area, new residential development is generally directed to existing hamlets (e.g. Anzac) and large-lot, exurban developments such as Sapræe Creek and Draper (RMWB Development Plan). In some of these areas, community-specific by-laws have been established to regulate OHV use (see 6.3).

### Industrial Development



With the exception of large-scale oil sands operations, industrial development in the Wood Buffalo region is generally located in or immediately adjacent to Fort McMurray. Industrial development is continuing in the vicinity of the Fort McMurray Regional airport, and will likely accelerate as a result of the Highway 63 / 881 Area Structure Plan (prepared in 2006), which identifies a high suitability for industrial development on lands between Highway 63 and the Airport. Given the number of (primarily snowmobile) trails in this area providing access to the Anzac and Stony Mountain area, there may be considerable demand to directly integrate recreational / trail corridors into this development.

Lands beyond the built up area of Fort McMurray is largely under Crown ownership, and with few exceptions, almost entirely subject to both surface and subsurface leases for oil sands exploration and development, as well as rights-of-way for power line and pipeline development. The experience of the Sno-Drifters Club demonstrates that there is a precedent for successfully coordinating trail development with utility rights-of-way and oil sands exploration. Over the longer term, there is an excellent opportunity to incorporate trail development as part of end-use rehabilitation required of mine sites, such as was achieved with the ongoing rehabilitation and recent certification of the Gateway Hill area by Syncrude.

### **Recreational Development**

The RMWB has recently completed an update to the Lower Townsite Area Redevelopment Plan, as well as a Riverfront Master Plan for the Clearwater River area. These plans identify the need to continue providing winter access to the Clearwater River at Snye Park, accommodate snowmobile access and use alongside other activities (e.g. skating, pond hockey), and provide complementary amenities (e.g. warming shelters).

Importantly, these plans acknowledge OHVs as a legitimate recreational opportunity within the community, and offer a vision of OHVs as a positive and integral piece of the culture of Fort McMurray and the Wood Buffalo region. As snowmobile and other events (e.g. races) become established on the Clearwater River, opportunities should be sought to ensure park areas are designed for year-round use with appropriate facilities.

Presently, the RMWB is commencing an Area Redevelopment Plan for the Waterways area. This area includes the Horse Pasture Park, which is a designated OHV staging area (providing access to the River and the former railway right-of-way). OHV activity within the community has been identified as an issue, and given the future potential



development of the Saline Creek Plateau, careful consideration will need to be given to the appropriateness of a staging area in community versus a potential relocation further to the south, free of conflicts with residential development.

### **4.3 TRADITIONAL LAND USES AND STAKEHOLDERS**

#### **First Nations and Métis**

Fort McMurray First Nation #468 consists of four reserves, one east of Fort McMurray near the confluence of Clearwater and Christina Rivers, and three southeast of Fort McMurray in the vicinity of Gregoire Lake.

There are numerous sites surrounding Fort McMurray that are significant to the First Nation and Métis communities, including berry picking, gathering areas and ceremonial burial grounds. These traditional land uses are significant and as a result consultation with this community is a critical component of conceptual trail alignment and land use selection.

#### **Trappers**

Licensed trappers operate traplines within Registered Fur Management Areas (RFMAs) in the lands around Fort McMurray and elsewhere. In addition, licensed trappers are presently allowed to operate OHVs within the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray. In discussions with trappers, user groups and stakeholders, conflicts have been identified between the activities of trappers and OHV users. Conflicts are mainly related to noise and physical disturbance, and are particularly acute in close proximity to the Urban Service Area boundary where there is greater OHV access and use.



#### **4.4 ALBERTA SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT**

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) is the provincial agency that manages fish and wildlife, oversees development of Alberta's forests and manages the use of public lands. Understanding relevant provincial regulations and ASRD management guidelines is critical to the successful planning and design of OHV trails.

##### **Fort McMurray - Athabasca Oil Sands Subregional Integrated Resource Plan**

The Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) was prepared in 1996, and amended in 2002. The key objective of the IRP was to establish a vision for land and resource use on Crown lands in the Wood Buffalo region. Generally, the IRP acknowledged that increased industrial activity offered the opportunity for increased recreational access within frontcountry areas.

##### **Mineable Oil Sands Strategy**

The Mineable Oil Sands Strategy (MOSS) was initiated by the Province of Alberta to update and ultimately supersede the Fort McMurray - Athabasca Oil Sands Subregional IRP. As such, MOSS represents a coordinated strategy of development and reclamation with respect to oil sands mining in northeastern Alberta. Specifically, the strategy delineates an area of mineable oil sands development, particularly on lands north of Fort McMurray.

Although MOSS focuses on the progressive and timely reclamation of mine sites, within the present land use context, MOSS clearly stresses the need to direct recreational access to lands outside of this development area.

##### **Provincial Land Use Framework**

The Provincial Land Use Framework was unveiled by the Province of Alberta in the spring of 2008. The framework advocates Integrated Land Management (ILM); a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach to land use planning with the goal of economic, environmental and social sustainability. A key objective of the Land Use Framework process was to identify six planning areas, including the Lower Athabasca Land-Use Planning Region (including the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, Lac la Biche County, and the Municipal District of Bonnyville). At pres-



ent, the Province has established a Lower Athabasca Regional Advisory Council, with the intention of completing a regional plan for this area by the end of 2010.

### **Forests Act**

The Province of Alberta Forests Act allows for the management for forest resources within the province. Of particular note, the Act includes land use planning tools which can designate three types of land bases which can accommodate recreational functions as part of a larger land use mix - Forest Recreation Areas, Forest Recreation Trails, and Forest Land Use Zones.

Forest Land Use Zones (FLUZes) represent the most significant trail planning and management tool, providing the Province the ability to react to local issues and circumstances and manage competing land use pressures (e.g. industrial, commercial and /or recreational). There are presently 19 FLUZes throughout Alberta (none in the Wood Buffalo region), and in each area there are location-specific regulations relating to recreational access.

OHV use is often permitted within Forest Recreation Areas, Forest Recreation Trails and Forest Land Use Zones, subject to limitations including:

- Restriction of use within specific areas / corridors;
- Maximum weights of machines permitted on trails; and
- Maximum operating speeds

### **Forest Management Areas**

Forest Management Areas (FMAs) represent long term land tenure that provides forest product companies with the right to manage, grow and harvest timber on a specific area of land. If recreational trails are proposed within an area with an FMA, the forest company must be closely consulted and may be eligible for compensation for any loss of land base required.

The Wood Buffalo region is within the Alberta-Pacific Forest Management Area. Significantly, Alberta-Pacific ad-



vocates and is implementing Integrated Land Management (ILM) principles within the FMA, notably, integrating timber harvesting with oil and gas operations and reducing / revegetating access roads and seismic lines.

### **Public Lands Act - Land Tenure**

Of a number of significant responsibilities, the Public Lands Act allows for the disposition of leases and other forms of land tenure, including those for recreational uses, on public lands designated as the Green Zone within Alberta. Methods of land tenure range from recreational leases to Licences of Occupation (LOCs); the specific type of tenure should reflect discussions between the RMWB, user groups and Alberta SRD.

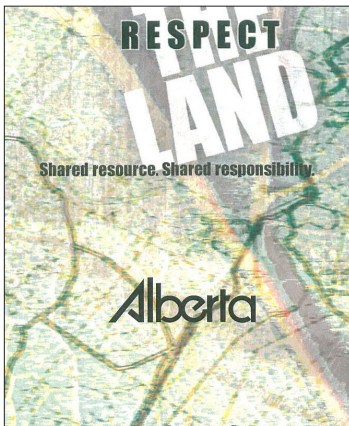
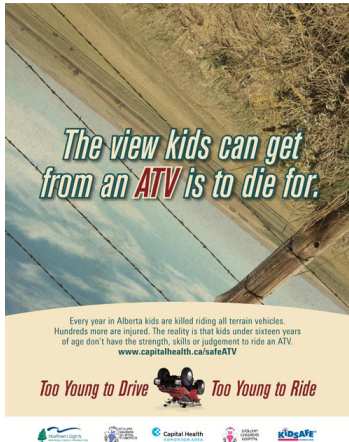
### **Registered Fur Management Areas**

ASRD administers Registered Fur Management Areas (RFMAs) in Alberta, corresponding to areas under trapping licence. Trapping licences provide access to animals and as such do not necessarily preclude other types of development (e.g. recreational / trail opportunities). In discussions with ASRD, it is suggested that consultation with local trappers is desirable when confirming trail alignment to minimize potential conflict.

## **4.5 ALBERTA TOURISM, PARKS AND RECREATION**

Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation (ATPR) is responsible for the management of recreational amenities on public lands within Alberta. For the purposes of this Master Plan, it is important to understand the various types of recreational designations:

- **Provincial Parks** preserve natural heritage and provide ready access to a wide range of activities, including outdoor recreation, heritage tourism and natural heritage appreciation. Typically, OHV use is not permitted in Provincial Parks. Gregoire Lake Provincial Park is located southeast of Fort McMurray, and includes 140 campsites, a day use and group use areas, and lake access.
- **Wildland Provincial Parks** also preserve natural heritage, but in less accessible sites; activities are more



**Above**

Northern Lights Campaign Poster  
ASRD Campaign Poster

typical of backcountry experiences, including backpacking, primitive camping and hiking. OHVs and snowmobiles are permitted on designated trails in some wildland parks. The Wood Buffalo region includes:

- **Stony Mountain Wildland Provincial Park**, featuring backcountry camping and hiking.
  - **Whitemud Falls Wildland Provincial Park**, featuring limited backcountry camping accessible by boat or OHV.
  - **Grand Rapids Wildland Provincial Park**, featuring cabin rentals accessible by boat or OHV.
- **Provincial Recreation Areas** provide outdoor tourism and recreation opportunities, including camping and day use activities, while providing access to lakes, rivers, and adjacent crown lands. Provincial Recreation Areas often serve as staging areas for backcountry lands, and as such OHV use is often permitted, subject to certain restrictions. The Wood Buffalo region includes:
    - **Hangingstone Provincial Recreational Area**, featuring a day use area and 56 campsites.
    - **Maqua Lake Provincial Recreation Area**, featuring a day use area, 15 campsites and hiking trails. This area has been observed to be in poor condition.

**Clearwater / Christina Heritage Rivers Management Plan**

Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation is also responsible for coordinating the Heritage Rivers project in Alberta. In the Fort McMurray area, the Clearwater and Christina Rivers fall under a Heritage Rivers Management Plan developed in 2003 (the rivers received formal designation in 1996).

The Management Plan provides a series of action statements to guide decision making towards the common vision of stakeholders who live, work and recreate along the river. The Plan is neither legislative nor regulatory; rather, it is intended to inform government and industry decision making. Major themes of the Plan include:

- **Natural integrity** – protecting natural features, landscapes and ecosystems.
- **Human heritage** – protecting of historical resources.
- **Recreation and Tourism** – ensuring continued quality of recreational experience with wilderness charac-



ter as an essential value.

- **Commercial / industrial use** – utilizing natural resources with management concepts which minimize environmental impact.
- **Settlement and agriculture** – supporting development compatible with natural / ecological / historic / recreational values in corridor.
- **Access** – carefully managing access to maintain / improve wilderness character. With regard to OHV use, it is specifically noted that OHV users should be encouraged to minimize shoreline disturbance and erosion.
- **Communication, education and interpretation** – developing the means for education, communication and dialogue among users to encourage responsible stewardship and minimize user conflict.

## 5.0 CURRENT EDUCATION / COMMUNICATION INITIATIVES

There are a number of existing education, communication and training initiatives underway by local, provincial and national organizations to encourage safe, fun and sustainable OHV use. A review of these resources importantly illustrates distinct streams: trail amenities; safe OHV use (both general and targeted to youth); and sustainable use of natural areas.

### 5.1 LOCAL USER RESOURCES

#### Websites

Locally, the Sno-Drifters, Wood Buffalo ATV Riders and McMurray Dirt Riders all have established websites providing information on their clubs and activities. Only the Sno-Drifters have mapping available on their websites, illustrating trails maintained by the club north and south of Fort McMurray. Provincial and national user and advocacy groups have websites as well, which provide information ranging from upcoming events to safety training opportunities.



### **Newsletters**

The McMurray Sno-Drifters are active in the area of ongoing communication to its members, preparing a monthly newsletter which is emailed to the membership. Contents of the newsletter typically includes: President's message; recognition of volunteer efforts and donations; updates on trail development; and promotion of upcoming events (e.g. rallies).

### **Trail Maps**

To date, only the McMurray Sno-Drifters have produced maps of trails regularly maintained by the club. These maps are presently available on the Sno-Drifter's website, as well as from Fort McMurray Tourism. Presently, RMWB Communications is working with the club to update and improve these maps, and at the same time incorporate basic information related to safe and respectful riding.

## **5.2 EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES**

### **Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo Communications Plan**

During the timeframe in which this Master Plan was being prepared, the RMWB Communications department initiated a communications campaign targeted at OHV users in and around Fort McMurray. Known as the 'Ride Right' campaign, the project built upon the concepts of positive messaging and self regulation.

A key component of this campaign was weekly radio ads, as well as regular media appearances by representatives of local user groups, to communicate messages regarding safe and respectful riding. To support this campaign, RMWB communications undertook a modest campaign to inform residents about the Urban Service Area and its boundaries, with the preparation and posting of mapping on the corporate website.

In the Spring of 2009, RMWB Communications reviewed its efforts with respect to this previous campaign and prepared an updated Annual Communications Plan. As with the previous effort, the plan acknowledges the need for messages related to:



- **Restriction of OHVs within the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray;**
- **Safe operation of ATVs and snowmobiles;** and
- **Trail stewardship / environmental responsibility**

The plan provides a detailed description of communication objectives, requirements and evaluation tools related to these three key message areas. However, with the exception of the Northern Lights Health Region campaign (see below), the RMWB plan does not identify any existing communication initiatives or future partnership opportunities.

The communications plan is provided in Appendix A.

#### **Ongoing RCMP and By-law Community Outreach**

The Fort McMurray RCMP Detachment and RMWB By-law have for some time taken an active role in educating the public about the laws and by-laws limiting OHV use in the region and at the same time supporting safe riding practices.

As an example, as a result of community concerns, RCMP and By-law travelled to Fort Chipewyan in the Fall of 2008 to meet with the community and clarify municipal by-laws related to OHV use. As a follow up, the RCMP Public Education Officer (a newly created position) initiated the development of pamphlets on OHV use in rural hamlets (with their own unique OHV by-law). Pamphlets were delivered in Summer 2009, with follow up public sessions within these rural communities..

In addition to conducting outreach directly with communities within the Municipality, RCMP and By-law have been active working directly with user groups promoting safe riding. For example, in the Fall of 2008 both the RCMP and By-law took part in the Safe Ride organized by the Sno-Drifters in association with other local groups. The support for and visibility at these events by the RCMP and By-law is significant in underscoring the importance of safe riding practices, and opportunities should be sought to continue these partnerships.



### **'The View Kids Can Get From an ATV is to Die For' Program**

This program was developed by (the former) Northern Lights Health Region in partnership with Capital Health and Stollery Hospital (Edmonton), and Safe Kids Connection. Launched in the Spring 2008, the message of the program is that youth under 16 are not physically or mentally prepared to operate an ATV. The program included print campaign (e.g. posters) and radio ads – both run in advance of and during long weekends. Spokespeople were also featured on local television to carry the message. The media component of the program is now complete; however, the program continues to have a presence on the partners' websites.

In April 2009, Northern Lights Health Region amalgamated with other health regions in Alberta to form Alberta Health Services; this organization now is the primary portal for information related to safe ATV use, particularly by teens, in Alberta.

### **'LIVE TO RIDE' Program**

The Live to Ride program was developed by, and is implemented by, Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation (AIT). The program encourages appropriate rider safety (e.g. protective gear, riding habits); a basic understanding of laws (in particular, the Traffic Safety Act); and basic etiquette (e.g. respecting the land and other users). The program has a web presence, and messages are communicated via brochure (print and electronic).

### **'RESPECT THE LAND' Program**

The Respect the Land program was developed by, and is implemented by, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD). The program focuses on and highlights sustainable trail use, including staying on trails, avoiding sensitive lands and water bodies, and respecting other users. The program has a web presence, and messages are communicated via brochure (print and electronic).

### **'SLED SMART' Snowmobile Safety and Education Program**

The Sled Smart program was developed by the Alberta Snowmobile Association (ASA). The program is targeted



at grade 7 to 9 students in smaller centres and rural areas; however, the program is designed to be delivered to a wider age range. The program includes a 'Safe Riders' video and posters and brochures for distribution. Originally intended for snowmobile use, the program has since been expanded to include safe ATV use.

The Sled Smart Program was recently offered to 1500 schoolchildren in the Fort McMurray area by the McMurray Sno-Drifters Club.

### **Kidsafe Connection**

Kidsafe Connection is a child and teen injury prevention program affiliated with Stollery Children's Hospital in Edmonton. The program's prime objective is to partner with other community stakeholders to develop and share resources with the public - primarily parents - related to injury prevention.

ATV use by youth is a significant focus of Kidsafe Connection, and the program offers a number of publications advocating that ATVs should only be operated by teens 16 years and older; that children should not ride ATVs as passengers; and that all riders should take safety courses and wear helmets and appropriate safety gear.

### **ATV Safety Watch Program**

The ATV Safety Watch program was developed by the Canadian All-Terrain Vehicle Distributors Council. The general objective of the program is to communicate and promote safe and responsible use of ATVs for all age groups. The program promotes the ATV Riders Course presented by CSC (below) and distributes a number of brochures, booklets and related information: a 'Parents, Youngsters and ATVs' brochure; a 'Tips for the ATV Rider' booklet; and a 'Like a PRO CD' interactive CD ROM - which presents real life riding situations and allows users to go through steps of identifying, understanding and taking proper actions to safely handle riding situations.

## **5.3 SAFETY TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES**

There are a number of excellent training programs of interest and value to OHV users, developed and delivered at



both the national and provincial level. Thanks to the efforts of user groups in the region, local users have had the opportunity to take part in some of these training opportunities within the community.

### **Canada Safety Council ATV Rider Course**

The Canada Safety Council (CSC) has developed a 5½ - 7 hour course, providing instruction on basic OHV operation including controls, reading terrain and cornering. The course is offered by Canada Safety Council certified instructors. The CSC also offers a separate ATV Rider's Course available for children under 14 whose parents specifically permit them to ride ATVs.

### **ASA Snowmobile Safety Course**

The Alberta Snowmobile Association (ASA), in partnership with Portage College, has developed a safety course for snowmobile users, including information on maintenance and operation. The course is provincially recognized, providing certification for recreational and workplace use.

### **Avalanche Skills Training**

The Canadian Avalanche Centre has developed, in conjunction with a number of stakeholders, both entry-level and intermediate avalanche skills training programs (AST 1 and AST 2). Both programs typically include both classroom and field work, and cover items such as: trip planning using the Avaluator (trip decision making tool with a web-based component), understanding snowpack stability, recognizing terrain, safe travel habits, search and rescue techniques, overall risk management. AST 2 training builds upon the entry-level subject matter and adds a minimum of three days of field exercises.

### **Dirt Bike training**

A new initiative on Dirt Bike Safety was piloted in October 2007 in Nova Scotia. The Canadian Standards Council (CSC), through an arrangement with the US Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) invited a Dirt Bike Chief Instructor to conduct this first Canadian course in safe dirt bike operation. The CSC intends to expand this Dirt Bike course



in other jurisdictions in the coming years. This training is based on the MSF's Dirt Bike School – a one day event for riders 6 and over. Dirt Bike School teaches basic riding skills and responsible riding practices, including risk management and environmental awareness.

### **Other Training Opportunities**

Other opportunities for OHV training include:

- **Third Party CSC certified training** - primarily targeted at industry
- **Training available for Search and Rescue Society volunteers**

## **5.4 OTHER SAFETY RELATED EVENTS**

### **International Snowmobile Safety Week**

International Snowmobile Safety Week is held each winter, and in different jurisdictions snowmobile clubs and user groups hold events including safety rides, seminars, displays and obstacle courses.

## **5.5 OTHER COMMUNICATION PARTNERS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

In addition to the groups and organizations previously identified, there are a number of key partners within the Wood Buffalo region which are (or could easily be) involved in the creation, coordination and delivery of messages related to safe, fun and respectful OHV use.

### **Safe Community Wood Buffalo**

Formerly the Wood Buffalo Safe / Healthy Community Network, Safe Community Wood Buffalo (SCWB) is a network of community organizations allied to share resources and knowledge, and ultimately promote safe and



healthy living, within the Wood Buffalo region. Importantly, SCWB includes representation from Northern Lights Health Region, RCMP, RMWB By-law, and the oil sands industry. This broad representation positions SCWB as an excellent coordinator of community-wide initiatives related to safety.

SCWB plays a pivotal role in developing and delivering programs related to public safety within the Wood Buffalo. At present, SCWB offers a number of safety programs, including Roadwatch / On The Move; and Family Safety Day. The latter is a day long event, held each spring, featuring displays and seminars from various stakeholders in the community.

Because of the broad representation on the organization's steering committee, and its' past success in developing and delivering safety programs and messages, SCWB is well positioned to play a key role in coordinating and delivering the full range of communication related to OHV use.

### **Oil Sands Safety Association**

The Oil Sands Safety Association (OSSA) is an industry-funded group which is primarily focused on industrial safety and training. In addition, the group fully recognizes the importance of safety outside the normal workday, and to this end, the group communicates messages via local media (e.g. regarding seatbelt use). In discussions with the OSSA, the organization is acutely aware of the need to communicate messages in an efficient, timely and relevant manner. The group is interested in the use of outdoor media (billboards), but acknowledges issues related to cost and availability. In addition, the group is interested in exploring options for electronic message boards along Highway 63 - mainly to communicate emergency information, but with the potential to include safety messages as well.

### **Private Oil Sands Companies**

Oil sands companies in the region presently invest significant financial and human resources in creating and managing health and safety policies, including safety programs, newsletters, etc. Given the proportion of Fort McMurray residents currently in the direct employ of the oil sands companies and their contractors, an excellent opportunity exists to jointly partner with these companies to disseminate information related to safe, fun and respectful OHV use.



### **Fort McMurray Tourism**

Fort McMurray Tourism is the main portal for tourism and recreation information within the Wood Buffalo region. With respect to this Master Plan, Fort McMurray Tourism provides information to the public on behalf of the Buffalo ATV Riders Club and McMurray Sno-Drifters club - in the past providing trail maps and selling trail passes. Fort McMurray Tourism also provides information to industry as part of corporate recruitment and relocation packages, and in this capacity is well positioned to market OHV opportunities (including groups, programs, trails and related tourism tie-ins) within the region and beyond.

As trail amenities and facilities continue to be developed in the region, and the economic development (e.g. tourism) potential of these trails becomes more fully realized, Fort McMurray tourism will play a key role in promoting these resources throughout Alberta and beyond.

### **OHV dealers**

There are a number of OHV dealers in Fort McMurray who, in addition to selling and servicing OHVs, play a valuable role in providing users information related to trail amenities, safe OHV use, licensing, etc. Dealers are represented by Canadian All-Terrain Vehicle Distributors Council.

## **5.6 COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES**

Despite the excellent resources and partnerships available within the region, there remain some challenges relating to effectively communicating information related to safe, fun and respectful OHV use.

### **Local Realtors**

Local informants have indicated that some realtors have mislead homebuyers regarding OHV regulations in the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray. Specifically, stories persist of potential buyers of homes adjacent to or near greenbelts being instructed by realtors that OHV use is permitted within these areas.



### Manufacturer's Advertising

Advertising for ATVs and snowmobiles often depict or promote use which may be perceived as dangerous, unsafe and / or disrespectful of the land and natural areas. For example, one website for a popular snowmobile speaks of "ripping through the gnarliest trails, bumps and corners" - arguably, these messages reinforce that notion that unsafe and disrespectful OHV use is not only acceptable but highly desired.

## 6.0 CURRENT ENFORCEMENT TOOLS

Illegitimate use within the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray, related mostly to complaints of noise, property damage and personal injury, is a significant issue within the community, and indeed, represent some of the key drivers of this Master Plan. Local and provincial regulations are relatively clear; however, as with many other communities in Alberta, the RMWB has experienced some difficulties in enforcing these regulations.

### 6.1 TRAFFIC SAFETY ACT, PROVINCE OF ALBERTA

The Traffic Safety Act regulates the use and operation of vehicles on highways; with respect to OHVs the Act regulates:

- **Use** - OHVs may not be operated on any highway, road or ditch unless permission has been expressly granted. In the case of a Provincial highway, the Minister may by order or permit authorize OHVs along any portion of a highway. In the case of a Municipality, council may, through by-law, authorize such vehicles along any portion of a highway. OHVs may cross highways, subject to certain conditions.
- **Licensure**- Not required on private land or off highway, or when crossing a highway; required when on-highway. Local guidelines may apply in municipalities, forest land use zones, special management areas, etc.



- **Minimum Driving Age** – No restriction on private land; 14 on public lands / highways. If riders are less than 14, they can operate OHVs under supervision.
- **Registration** – No requirement on private land; required on public lands / highways.
- **Insurance** – No requirement on private land; required on public lands / highways.
- **Helmet use** – Not required unless required by municipal by-law.
- **Equipment** – OHVs must be equipped with a headlamp, tail lamp and muffler.

## 6.2 REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF WOOD BUFFALO BY-LAW 98/078

RMWB By-law 98/078 generally restricts the use of Off Highway Vehicles with the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray. Exceptions to this restriction include By-Law Enforcement Officers and Trappers (having signed an affidavit- subject to regulations regarding speed and use). Individuals may be exempt through special permit only.

In addition, the By-law designates OHV staging areas at Snye Park, Abasand and Horse Pasture (Waterways). By-law 98 / 078 is included in Appendix B.

Beyond the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray, separate by-laws for Anzac / Gregoire Lake and Sapræe Creek have been enacted to regulate OHV use in these areas. These by-laws allow limited OHV use on roadways within the hamlet, subject to conditions with regard to speed, hours of operation, and use (e.g. not for recreational purpose). In both cases, OHVs can be operated by individuals holding a valid Operator's or Learner's Licence, and in Anzac / Gregoire Lake, OHVs can also be operated by trappers.



### 6.3 ENFORCEMENT REALITIES AND CHALLENGES

In 2008, 314 charges were laid by RMWB By-law Enforcement for offences related to OHV use within Fort McMurray. Hotspots for illegitimate OHV use include Beacon Hill, Timberlea (Harpe Way / Timberlea Athletic Park / Confederation Way), Abasand, Waterways (Paradise), Gregoire (Moberly Hall) and Highway 63 (Prairie Creek to the Dirt Riders track).

At present, there is one fine of \$50.00 for operating an OHV in the Urban Service Area. In addition, offenders can be charged under the Traffic Safety Act for infractions such as driving on a roadway, having no registration or insurance, etc. Fines can increase to \$800, along with mandatory court appearances, for serious and / or multiple offences. Specific charges can also be laid in relation to property damage.

In terms of personnel and equipment, RMWB By-law presently has 15 by-law officers, with plans to increase staff to 32 by the end of 2009. To assist with enforcement, the unit has 2 snowmobiles and 1 ranger. In discussions with RMWB By-law, a number of issues related to current by-laws and enforcement have been identified, including:

- The appropriateness of by-laws in exurban / rural hamlets given changing demographics;
- Safely pursuing and / or stopping offenders;
- Laying charges without formal complaints / statements;
- Relatively modest fines;
- Staff vacancies and a lack of resources;
- Staging areas in residential areas - can require trailering over very small distances;
- Smaller residential lots in newer developments - often requires trailering in alleys and roadways; and
- Discretion to allow ATVs for reasonable purposes; e.g. clearing snow on sidewalks.

### 6.4 ALBERTA SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

In addition to passive OHV restriction afforded through Forest Recreation Areas, Forest Recreation Trails and Forest



Land Use Zones, ASRD staff are able to enforce the Traffic Safety Act as well as relevant municipal by-laws. For example, within the Wood Buffalo region, as in other parts of Alberta, ASRD operates a Backcountry Guardian program. Under this program, ASRD patrols areas such as the Richardson Backcountry and the fish ponds / day use areas south of Fort McMurray on Highway 63.

## 7.0 BEST PRACTICE REVIEW

As an integral component of the background information gathering process, the Project Team undertook best practice research. This research included a review of existing trail plans, regulations and management strategies, and the interviewing of key individuals in other communities in Alberta.

In Alberta, there has been a wide range of experience in the management of OHVs. Several municipalities and government agencies spoke of their frustration with the rapid expansion of OHV use in locations where the activity is unwelcome. Common complaints relate to environmental damage, conflict among trail users, conflict with other land uses (residential, logging, highways) as well as excessive speed and noise. Response to these issues in several jurisdictions includes outright bans or restrictive regulations.

Municipalities that allow some OHV use (along roads, on designated routes) have encountered major problems with enforcement. Some have changed their by-laws to only allow trailering of OHV's, while other municipalities suggest they would like to change to a more restrictive approach.

In discussions with representatives and stakeholders across Alberta, components of effective OHV management strategies appear to include:

- **Designated Trails or Routes** - Designating specific trails for different OHV types (ATV / Snowmobile / 4x4 / Truck / Motorcycle / Non-motorized). Detailed maps of the trails and applicable rules usually accompany the designation process.
- **Regulations and Enforcement** - Developing and implementing specific rules or by-laws on the type of use,



speed limits, insurance, wearing of helmets and in some cases specific seasons of use (e.g. December 1 to April 30).

- **Trail Construction Standards** - Developing trail construction standards related to type of use, surface tread type, gradients, widths, clearances, etc. Specific standards for stream crossings are often addressed.
- **Volunteer Stewardship Groups** - Establishing volunteer groups to be involved in the day-to-day management of trails, including condition monitoring, trail repairs and improvements, sign installation, and awareness programs on trail etiquette and rules.
- **Stakeholder Advisory Committees** - Encouraging trail stakeholders to meet on an ongoing basis to coordinate their activities and work out differences of opinion on management actions.
- **Public Awareness Programs** - Developing programs to inform the public and visitors about trail regulations, designated activities/routes and trail etiquette.
- **Marketing** - Where trails are designed to attract visitors or tourists (e.g. Crowsnest Pass, Iron Horse Trail), developing marketing programs including utilizing maps, brochures, targeted advertising, websites and tourism guides.

The detailed results of the best practice review are presented in Appendix C.

## 8.0 PUBLIC / STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Over the course of the Master Planning exercise, consultation was sought with both the public as well as key stakeholders involved in the development and management of OHV opportunities within the region. At the beginning of the project, both RMWB staff and user group representatives were consulted on key issues and opportunities, and as the planning process evolved these user groups were consulted again on the status of the plan, and specifically, opportunities for trail development in the Fort McMurray area. Finally, in November of 2008, the



draft plan was shared with the public at an open house.

### **8.1 RMWB STAFF AND USER GROUP CONSULTATION - APRIL 2008**

At the outset of the project, RMWB staff and representatives of user groups were consulted, to identify key issues, opportunities and constraints, in order to more fully understand the scope of the Master Planning exercise. At the first meeting, with RMWB staff, the following items were raised for discussion:

- Existing facilities (e.g. trails, staging areas, training areas);
- Communication / education / enforcement programs;
- Physical barriers / constraints / environmental issues;
- Current OHV regulations (strengths and weaknesses);
- User safety / trail hotspots;
- Conflicts between user groups;
- Conflicts with public / other users ;
- User profiles / attitudes (e.g. northern mentality);
- Partnership opportunities – RMWB / User groups;
- Trail maintenance;
- Urban / rural interface / trail access;
- Awareness / Information / misinformation – users / new residents;
- Enforcement opportunities and challenges; and
- Trail planning and design opportunities (e.g. classification / difficulty / locations / facilities)

Subsequent to this meeting, representatives of the McMurray Sno-Drifters and Wood Buffalo ATV Riders, as well as other stakeholders, were consulted in order to identify key issues, opportunities and constraints. Generally speaking, this consultation raised similar issues and opportunities as identified by RMWB staff. Unique issues and opportunities that were raised during this consultation included:

- Partnerships (including OHV dealers, industry);
- Safety training opportunities;



- Land use coordination / conflicts (e.g. surface and subsurface leases / ASRD);
- Tourism / marketing opportunities;
- Difficulty in recruiting volunteers;
- Fewer complaints targeted towards snowmobilers;
- Conflicts between 4 x 4s and ATVs on existing trails;
- Conflicts between ATVs and snowmobiles – mainly in shoulder seasons; and
- Conflicts between OHVs and trappers – southwest towards Grand Rapids Wildland Provincial Park

Representatives of the McMurray Dirt Riders were not able to attend the above meetings. At a later date, a representative of this group was interviewed in order to understand their perspectives on the Master Planning project. From this interview, it was gleaned that the Dirt Riders:

- Could utilize a trail network for leisure riding, Cross Country racing (35 km loop), Hare Scramble (5-25 km) or Endurocross (3-6 km obstacle course); and
- Would be interested in providing their track facility for safety training or similar purposes.

## 8.2 PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE - NOVEMBER 2008

In November 2008, the draft Master Plan was presented to the public in an informal open house format, in order to communicate the overall objectives of the plan, as well as the key recommendations intended to be carried forward. As a part of this open house, participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire. Key observations gleaned as a part of this process included:

- The general importance of addressing illegal Off Highway Vehicle use in the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray;
- The importance of addressing illegal OHV use, and developing OHV trails, relative to other municipal priorities, workloads and budgets;
- The development of new trails on lands around Fort McMurray as the highest priority activity.



Stacked Loop



Satellite Loop



Spoked Wheel

**Above**

Common Trail Alignment Options  
(Nova Scotia Trails Federation)

- The identification of other high priorities including establishing better communications (e.g. websites, maps and newsletters); increasing fines for illegal use; and establishing a Trail Steward Program.

The full questionnaire results are presented in Appendix D.

### 8.3 CONTINUED PUBLIC INPUT AND ENGAGEMENT

Continued public input and engagement is a necessary component of continued Master Plan development and implementation. Specifically, it is critical to ensure that the plan remains relevant, reflecting the issues, needs and desires of users and the public. A proposed program of continued public input and engagement is discussed in detail in Section 12.



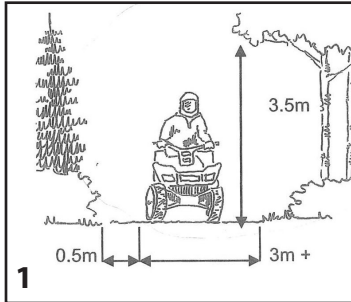
## PART THREE - DEVELOPING A MASTER PLAN

*From the synthesis of the background information, including discussions with user groups and stakeholders, as well as a review of relevant best practices, it is clear that a multi-faceted approach is needed to address current issues and future opportunities related to OHV use in the Wood Buffalo region. Therefore, the Master Plan advances a '4-E' approach focusing equally on:*

- **Engineering** safe, fun and sustainable OHV facilities;
- **Educating** users and communicating key messages;
- Creating effective **enforcement** strategies; and
- **Evaluating** and monitoring OHV management.

*This balanced approach builds upon, and seeks to further integrate, the key notions that:*

- *Legitimate user experiences be provided for legitimate users;*
- *OHV experiences are 'safe fun / fun safe';*
- *The land and natural systems are protected and respected;*
- *Existing information networks are strengthened and resources better coordinated;*
- *User groups work together for their common benefit and are supported in their good work;*
- *The community at large understands and supports the work of the Plan and its stakeholders;*
- *Mechanisms be developed and implemented which allow for ongoing evolution of the Plan; and*
- *The Master Plan and its initiatives acknowledge that OHVs are an integral part of life in the Northern Alberta and should therefore be addressed in a positive manner.*



**Above**

- 1) Trail clearance standard (Province of Alberta)
- 2) Typical erosion control measures (Minnesota DNR)
- 3) Typical stream crossing / armouring (Minnesota DNR)

## 9.0 ENGINEERING SAFE, FUN AND SUSTAINABLE OHV FACILITIES

*The development of safe, fun and sustainable facilities in the Wood Buffalo region is arguably the most important outcome of this process, as it responds to several of the guiding principles mentioned previously; not the least important of which is the goal of developing legitimate OHV experiences as a positive alternative to illegitimate use within the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray. Furthermore, the development of a trail networks provides a tangible focus to the activities of the RMWB, user groups and stakeholders, as well as the understanding and appreciation of the issue by the public at large.*

*This section provides an overview of the trail planning and design process, including the anticipated steps in the regulatory approval process, with a particular focus on potential trail development in the Fort McMurray area. Consideration is also given to the advancement of OHV access control measures necessary for the continued protection of park, open space and trail assets and users.*




### 9.1 THE TRAIL PLANNING AND DESIGN PROCESS

Planning and designing OHV trails in the Wood Buffalo region, as in any area, is a multi-phased approach, and must consider all of the necessary consultation and regulatory approvals. The process can be broadly defined as follows:

- **Conceptual Planning** - Defining the project and program; conducting site inventory and analysis; identifying opportunities and constraints, and identifying preliminary corridor alignment parameters.
- **Detailed Design / Regulatory Consultation** - Consultation with affected regulatory agencies; necessary fieldwork; detailed trail alignment and design; design of accompanying features and amenities (e.g. staging areas, signage program).



**Figure 5**  
Sample trail planning and design standards

	 <b>Beginner</b>	 <b>Intermediate</b>	 <b>Expert</b>
<b>Grade</b>	8% max. sustained slope 15% short pitch (8m length) 25% very short pitch	12% max. sustained slope 25% short pitch (5m length) 35% very short pitch	12% max. sustained slope 35% short pitch (4m length) 50% very short pitch (rare)
<b>Tread Width</b>	3.0m +	2.0 - 3.0m	1.5 -2.5m
<b>Curve Radius</b>	Easy flowing curves	Approaches minimum turning radii of OHV machines, requiring some manoeuvring	Can exceed minimum turning radii of OHV machines, requiring extensive manoeuvring
<b>Minimum Horizontal Clearance</b>	4.0m +	2.5 - 4.0m	1.5 -2.5m
<b>Minimum Vertical Clearance</b>	3.5m	3.5m	3.5m
<b>Tread Surface</b>	Relatively smooth, no rocks or roots protruding more than 75mm	Relatively rough sections, rock outcrops, ledge climbs, mudholes and small drainage crossings acceptable	Relatively rough with very rough short sections, rock outcrops, varying slopes, frequent drainage crossings desirable.
<b>Wet / muddy areas</b>	Allow dry by-pass	Significant wet areas have dry by-pass	May have no dry by-pass

- **Regulatory Approval** - Submission of the necessary applications to affected regulatory agencies.

### 9.1.1 CONCEPTUAL PLANNING

The first phase of the trail planning and design process involves establishing the broadest of parameters, related to overarching programmatic requirements as well as site opportunities and constraints, in order to identify preliminary corridor alignment parameters.



### **Project Definition / Initial Program Development**

The purpose of the project definition phase is to establish a clear direction for trail planning, based on the specific needs of users within the larger intent of trail development. This phase will establish overall guiding principles and a general programmatic approach related to such issues as:

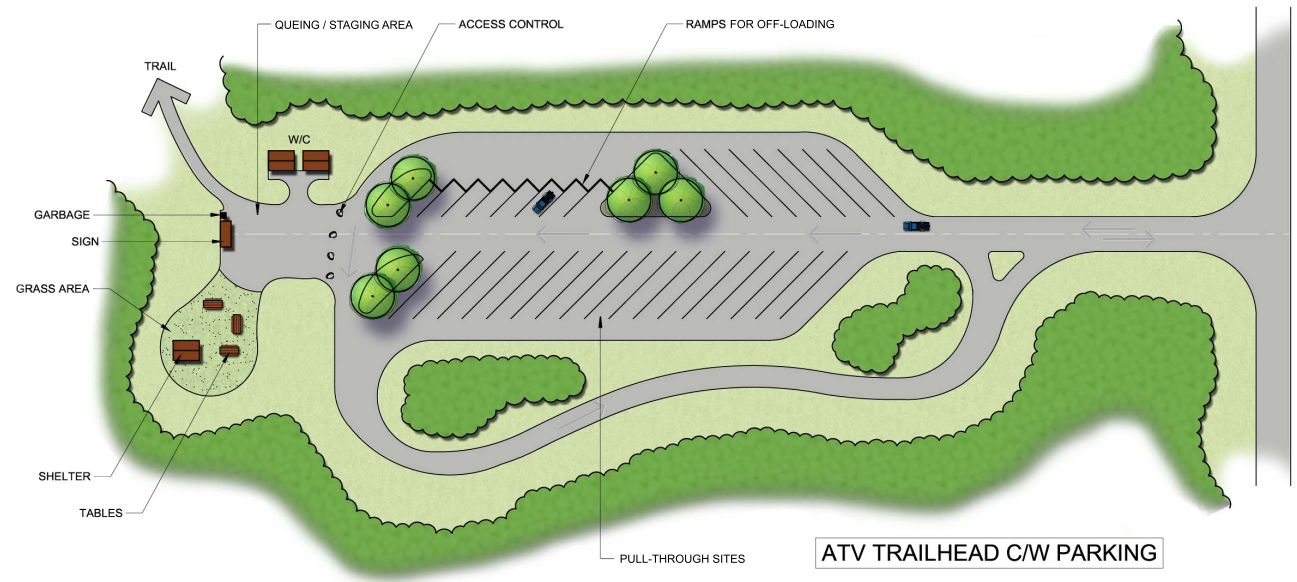
- Type of trail experience (e.g. primitive vs. developed);
- Segregation / integration of different OHV users as well as other non-motorized (e.g. equestrian) users;
- Accommodation of different ability levels;
- Degree of environmental protection;
- Necessary requirements (e.g. staging areas) and preferred amenities (e.g. picnic areas);
- Opportunities to connect to other / future trails; and
- Other opportunities (e.g. interpretive potentials).

### **Site Inventory and Analysis**

In this phase, consideration is given to the environmental and land use planning context of the area identified for trail development. Primarily a desktop exercise, in this phase existing conditions (including existing trails, land use constraints, oil leases and rights-of-way, vehicular access, significant ungulate habitat, surface waters, topography and natural features) should be mapped to assist with preliminary corridor planning and alignment.



**Figure 6**  
Sample trail planning and design standards



### Conceptual Corridor Alignment / Program Refinement

This next phase, once site opportunities and constraints have been identified and mapped, involves the identification of trail alignment opportunities. Based on the best practice review, there are a number of distinctive forms of trail networks, each with their respective benefits and drawbacks. Ultimately, the preferred trail alignment should reflect the larger guiding principles as articulated by users. Potential trail alignment models include:

- **Linear** - Provides point-to-point travel, typically connecting multiple destinations or connecting to other trail networks. This configuration is highly conducive to two-way traffic, which can ease wayfinding but potentially double the environmental impact on potentially sensitive lands.
- **Maze** - An interconnected trail network, often evolving from existing trails, rights-of-way, etc., and incorporating a variety of trail experiences. As a potential concept for new trail development, the maze config-

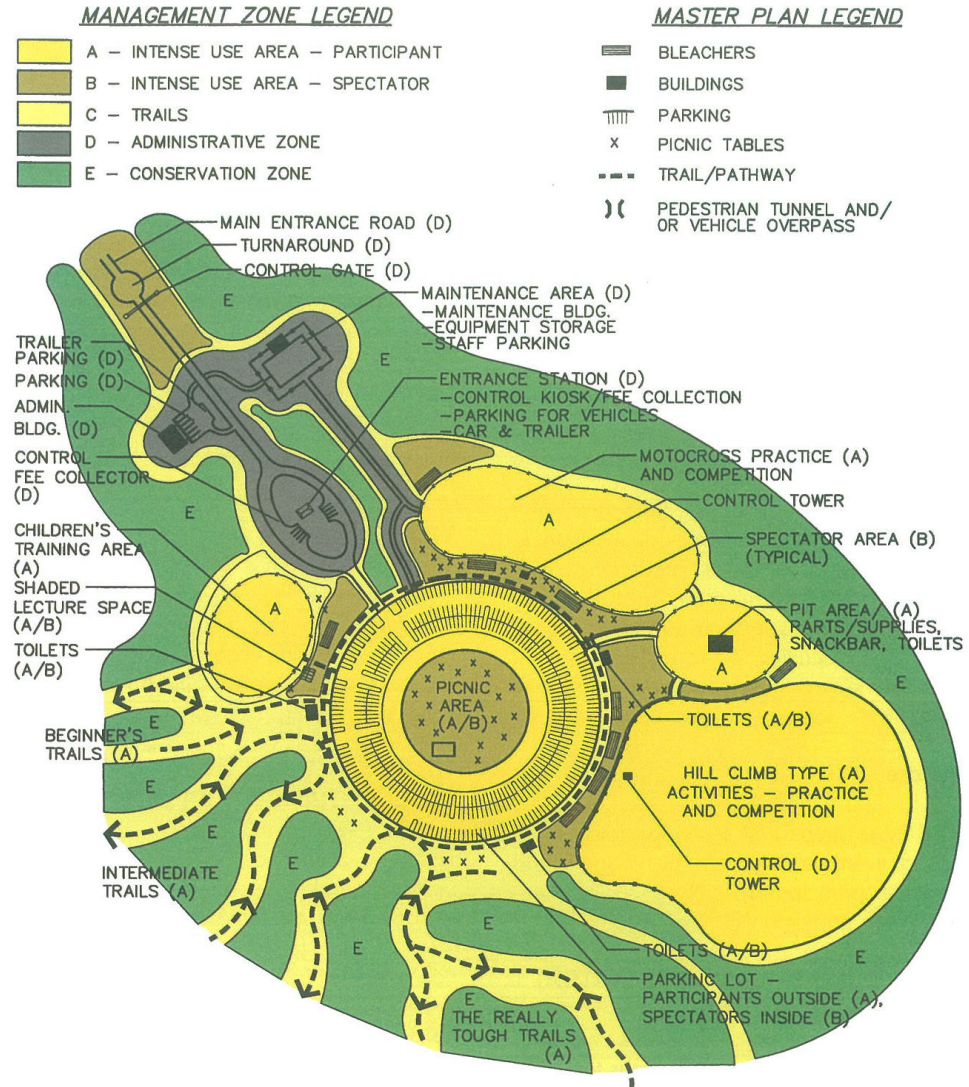


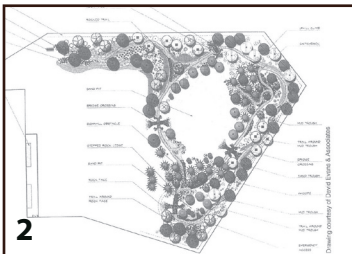
**Above**

OHV parks features can include 1) MX tracks (The Ridge); and 2) youth areas, (Gypsum City)

**Right / Figure 7**

Prototypical OHV Park (Fogg)





**Above**

Examples of training and educational facilities include 1) and 2) Honda Training Facility (Colton) and 3) Prairie City SVRA Environmental Training Centre (State of California)

uration does not easily accommodate riders of different experience levels, and managing traffic (e.g. with respect to direction and wayfinding) is difficult.

- **Loop** - Allows for a relatively long distance trail within a small footprint of land. This configuration is suited to areas accessible from one staging area. In a loop configuration, traffic can be one- or two-way, and easily controlled. In turn, the impact on the environment can be less than with a linear arrangement.
- **Stacked Loop** - A variation on the loop concept, with loops nested inside of each other. This configuration is ideally suited to a small area, and the nested loops can accommodate a range of experience levels. Loops can be one- or two-way; however, there is a need for good directional and wayfinding signage at trail junctions.
- **Satellite Loop** - Another loop variation; a central loop designed for all activity level levels provides access to a number of secondary loops with varying levels of difficulty. This configuration requires more land than a stacked loop system, and may create an unacceptable level of traffic on the central loop trail.
- **Spoked Wheel** - Similar to a satellite loop concept, except that each loop originates from a central point or facility, and is separate from other loops. The benefit of the spoked wheel is that each individual loop can accommodate varying experience levels with little conflict. All of the issues around traffic direction and signage common to loop configurations apply.

### 9.1.2 DETAILED DESIGN AND REGULATORY CONSULTATION

With a clear understanding of the programmatic requirements and corresponding trail alignment potential, the next step in the trail planning process is the detailed design of the trail network, undertaken in conjunction with the first steps in the regulatory approval process.

#### Consultation with Affected Agencies and Groups



**Above**

- 1) Coal Creek OHV Area (coal-creekohv.com)
- 2) Black Mountain Off-Road Adventure Area (atvrideronline.com)
- 3) Badlands ORV Park (utvguide.net)

## OHV PARK EXAMPLES

### Coal Creek OHV Area

Coal Creek OHV Area is located 250km east of Nashville, Tennessee, on approximately 72,000 acres of land privately owned by the Coal Creek Company, which since 1872 has been involved in coal mining, timber harvesting and similar resource extraction. The facility include 400km of trails including cambers and hill climbs. Vehicles permitted include trucks, ATVs, motorcycles and mountain bikes. A Land Use Permit (\$17 / day) is required to access the site. The site is managed and maintained by the Windrock ATV Club, who run a number of events yearly. Nearby lodgings include Windrock Park (RV sites, free primitive camping, and cabin rentals).

(dirtopia.com, coalcreekohv.com)

### Black Mountain Off-Road Adventure Area

Black Mountain is located 160km north of Knoxville, Tennessee, on approximately 7000 acres of former coal mining and timber lands. The area has been leased by the Harlan County Outdoor Recreation Board, for the purposes of increasing recreational opportunities and encouraging economic development in a depressed region of Appalachia. The facility includes 320km of trails, and a 31-day General Use Permit is 20\$. The nearby Harlan County Ridge Runners ATV Club run a number of events through the year. Nearby lodgings include the Harlan County Campground and RV park (RV sites, camping, cabin rentals). Other amenities include showers, restrooms, general store, ATV rentals, and nearby restaurants nearby. Future plans on the site include the addition of horseback riding and hiking

(atvrideronline.com, harlancountytrails.com)

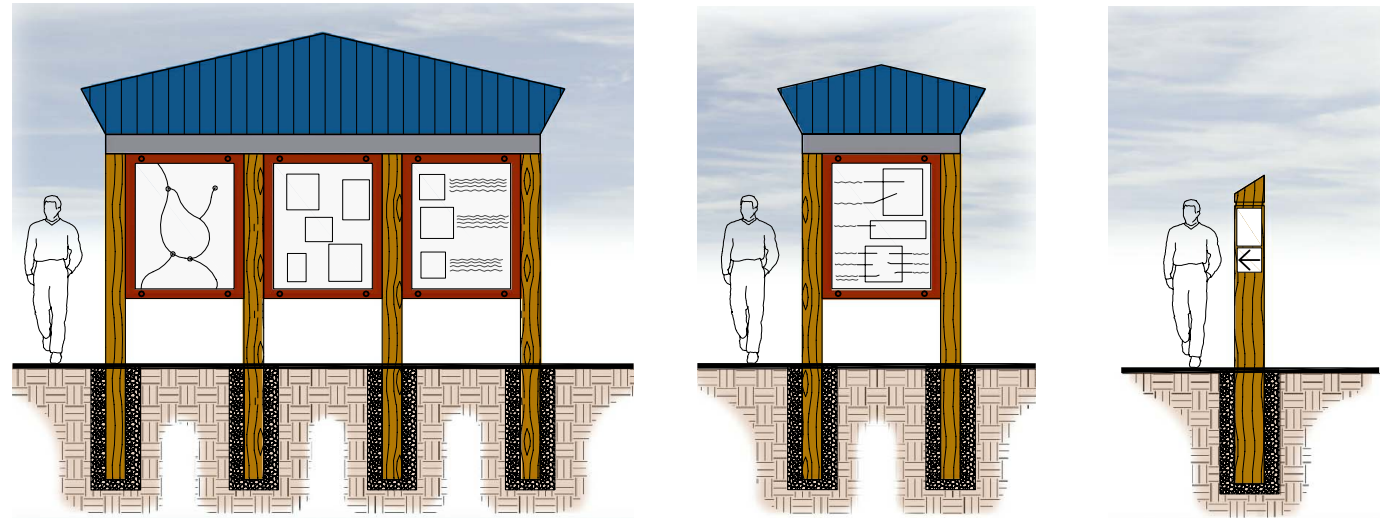
### Badlands ORV park

Badlands ORV Park is located 125km northwest of indianapolis, on 800 acres of a former sand and gravel operation. The facility is privately owned, and caters to a range of vehicles. Access to the site is \$30 / day and requires a waiver and liability form. Lodgings include adjacent campgrounds and hotels. Other amenities include a restaurant and repair shop. The Park can be rented for private events.

(badlandsoffroad.com)



**Figure 8**  
Conceptual illustration, trail signs



The first step of this phase involves the identification and consultation with affected groups and stakeholders. In the Fort McMurray context, this would typically include Alberta SRD; Alberta Environment; Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation; Fisheries and Oceans Canada; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada; affected leaseholders and local Métis and First Nations communities.

A significant outcome of this consultation process is the development of a Terms of Reference for the regulatory application, which would include the identification of necessary requirements, fieldwork, etc.

### **Fieldwork and Detailed Trail Alignment**

This phase also includes a detailed on-the-ground assessment of site conditions - necessary to advance the detailed alignment of the proposed trail, and as required, expand or revisit consultation needs to satisfy regulatory approval requirements (above).

From the perspective of more detailed trail alignments, clearly, 'fitting' the trails to the landscape (and its environmental and ecological context) is of critical importance. In addition to the due consideration of wildlife habitat,



sensitive areas, etc., specific consideration should be given to:

- The identification of stream crossings as significant constraints to overall trail network alignment and development. Careful planning of trail alignments to minimize and / or locate crossings at suitable locations (e.g. high banks, rocking stream beds) can reduce costs and minimize the environmental impact of trails.
- Landform (and associated slope stability / erosion concerns) as important contributors to specific trail alignments and the specific trail experience. Trail planning can incorporate a variety of spatial sequences (e.g. short rises, vertical curves, changing trail widths) to create a desirable user experience, increase perceived trail length, and as appropriate, manage trail speeds.
- The identification of control points such as trailheads and destinations which impact trail routing.

### Trail Development and Construction Standards

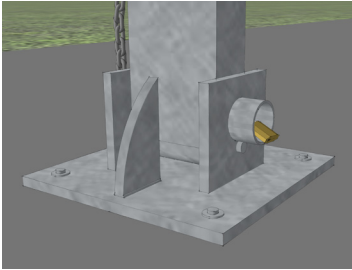
To assist in detailed trail alignment, it is valuable to establish trail development and construction standards. Trail development standards can describe various design parameters (e.g. trail widths, clearances, grades, etc.) and should be appended to the regulatory application (See Figure 5 for a sample).

In addition, trail construction standards should be developed which detail the development of specific features and amenities to be required as part of trail development. These details may include:

- **Wet area crossings** - e.g. rafting / boardwalk structures;
- **Stream crossings** - e.g. bridges, culverts, armouring;
- **Drainage / geotechnical concerns** - e.g. retaining walls, cross- and longitudinal drainage details; and
- **Features, facilities and amenities** - e.g. staging areas, signage, access control, etc (see below).

### Preparation of Regulatory Application

The final step in this phase is the preparation of the Regulatory Application, outlining the consultation processes and detailed trail alignment. Significant components of this regulatory application may include Development Permits (RMWB), an Environmental Assessment Report and an Historical Impact Assessment.



**Figure 9**

Opportunities to retrofit existing bollards include welding collars around lock areas; and welding flanges to help maintain bollards in a vertical position

### 9.1.3 REGULATORY APPROVAL

#### Submission of Regulatory Application to Affected Agencies

This phase includes the submission of the application, and all other necessary requirements, to the affected agencies. In the Fort McMurray context, these agencies typically include Alberta SRD, Alberta Environment and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (as appropriate); though the specific requirements vary by agency, they generally include applications for a Licence of Occupation (LOC), an Environmental Assessment Report and appropriate notifications (e.g. letter).

#### Approval for Tenure

Once the application has been approved, the basis of tenure (e.g. LOC, recreational lease) can be negotiated with Alberta SRD.

## 9.2 TRAIL FEATURES, FACILITIES AND AMENITIES

A key component of the detailed trail design process is the identification, planning and design of amenities that are essential and at the same time add value to the user experience. These amenities and features include staging areas, OHV parks / training facilities, picnic areas, emergency facilities, signage and access control.

#### Staging Areas

Staging areas provide needed areas for parking, trail access, minor repairs and orientation / group meeting. As part of the planning process, consideration should also be given to the integration of complementary recreational amenities to add value to the trail experience. Planning and design considerations include:

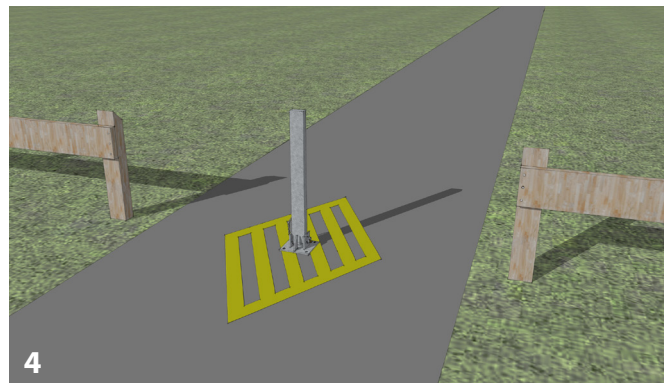
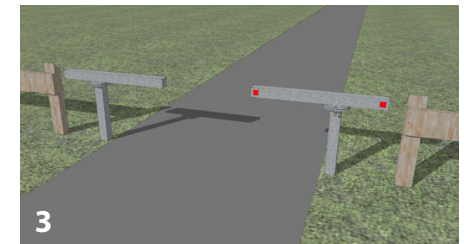
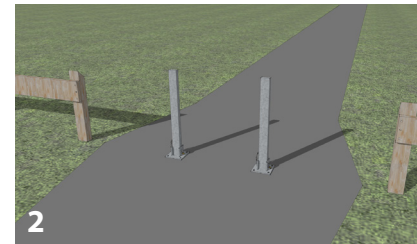
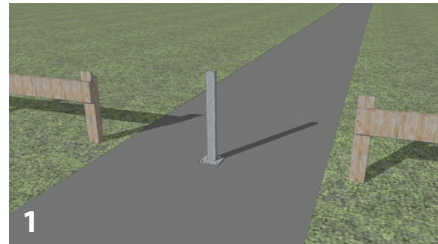


**Right**

Current access control methods as used by the RMWB, including 1) single; 2) double and 3) 'T-type' bollards.

**Figure 10**

Conceptual options for improving the current design of access control measures include 4) striping pathways for better channelization; 5) converting double bollards to a single swinging gate; and 6) and 7) combining swinging gates with raised planters (shown open and closed)





**Figure 9**

Potential changes to access control design along open spaces and roadways include 1) bollards; 2) rip rap and boulders and 3) a combination of hard and soft landscaping to create a safe zone for pedestrian use and push OHVs to the roadway edge





- **Access** – Efficient vehicular circulation with roadway geometries allowing for generous turning movements;
- **Parking** – Oversize stalls to provide adequate room for trucks / trailers, with a preference for pull-through parking stalls. As appropriate, ramps can be integrated to ease unloading from trucks.
- **Orientation** - Well placed, visible signage should include regulatory signage, maps and other wayfinding signage, as well as adequate space for groups to assemble and coordinate.
- **Recreational amenities** – Day use amenities which complement trail use can include picnic areas / shelters and modern washrooms. Other convenience features should include garbage / recycling facilities.

### OHV Parks

Dedicated OHV parks are becoming an increasingly common component of OHV trail systems across North America. In brief, OHV parks represent an evolution of the staging area into a multi-purpose leisure destination. OHV parks continue to serve as staging areas trail networks, but also often incorporate specific areas designated to challenge riders (e.g. hill climbs and mud pits). In addition, complementary leisure uses are often programmed into these parks which allow the facilities to become day use destinations for groups or families. Complementary uses typically include areas for mountain biking, model airplane and car racing, picnicking / day use, and camping. A review of current OHV parks, particularly in the central, southern and western United States indicates a vast range of facilities, owned and developed by private individuals, resource corporations, and municipal and state governments and agencies. It should also be noted that these facilities represent significant tourism destinations, and are therefore include and / or are jointly marketed with campgrounds, RV parks, bed and breakfasts, etc. A prototypical OHV park is illustrated in Figure 7.

Increasingly, OHV parks are being developed with a specific educational intent, related to safe and / or respectful riding. For example, in the United States the Honda Corporation has developed a number of training facilities which are primarily intended to train riders in the safe operation of OHVs; however, a key component of these facilities is messaging relating to environmental preservation and resource conservation. In the Honda Facilities, as well as similar facilities managed by the State of California in a number of State Vehicular Recreational Areas (SVRAs), the native landscape is reintroduced / preserved, to communicate to riders the significance of environmental stewardship.



<b>Trail Attributes</b>	<b>Trail Class 1 Primitive/Undeveloped</b>	<b>Trail Class 2 Simple/Minor Development</b>	<b>Trail Class 3 Developed/Improved</b>	<b>Trail Class 4 Highly Developed</b>	<b>Trail Class 5 Fully Developed</b>
<b>Trail Management</b>	<p>Typically managed to accommodate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Low use levels</li> <li>♦ Highly skilled users, comfortable off-trail.</li> <li>♦ Users with high degree of orienteering skill.</li> <li>♦ Some travel modes and ability levels may be impractical or impossible, and may not be encouraged.</li> <li>♦ Water Trails: Users require high level of navigation/orientation and paddling skills.</li> </ul>	<p>Typically managed to accommodate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Low-to-moderate use levels</li> <li>♦ Mid-to-highly skilled users, capable of traveling over awkward condition/obstacles</li> <li>♦ Users with moderate orienteering skill.</li> <li>♦ Trail suitable for many user types, but challenging and involves advanced skills.</li> <li>♦ Water Trails: Moderate to high level of navigation/orientation and paddling/piloting skills required</li> </ul>	<p>Typically managed to accommodate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Moderate to heavy use</li> <li>♦ Users with intermediate skill level and experience</li> <li>♦ Users with minimal orienteering skills</li> <li>♦ Moderately easy travel by managed use types</li> <li>♦ Random potential for accessible use</li> <li>♦ Water Trails: Basic to moderate navigation and paddling/piloting skills required.</li> </ul>	<p>Typically managed to accommodate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Very heavy use</li> <li>- Users with minimal skills and experience</li> <li>- Users with minimal or no orienteering skills.</li> <li>- Easy/comfortable travel by managed use types</li> <li>- May be (or has potential to be made) accessible.</li> <li>- Water Trails: Basic navigation and paddling/piloting skills required.</li> </ul>	<p>Typically managed to accommodate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Intensive use</li> <li>♦ Users with limited trail skills and experience.</li> <li>♦ Trail typically meets agency requirements for accessibility</li> <li>♦ Includes "Pedestrian Trails".</li> </ul>
<b>Maintenance Indicators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Resource protection</li> <li>♦ Safety commensurate with targeted recreational experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Resource protection</li> <li>♦ Safety commensurate with targeted recreational experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Resource protection</li> <li>♦ User convenience</li> <li>♦ Safety commensurate with targeted recreational experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- User comfort and ease</li> <li>- Resource Protection</li> <li>- Safety commensurate with targeted recreational experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ User comfort and ease</li> <li>♦ Targeted high level of accessibility to key recreational opportunities.</li> <li>♦ Safety commensurate with targeted recreational experience</li> </ul>
<b>Maintenance Frequency &amp; Intensity</b> **	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Infrequent or no scheduled recurring maintenance.</li> <li>♦ Maintenance interval is typically 5 or more years, or in response to reports of unusual resource problems requiring repair.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Maintenance scheduled to preserve the trail facility and route location.</li> <li>♦ Maintenance interval typically 3-5 years, or in response to reports of unusual problems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Trail cleared to make available for use early in use season, and to preserve trail integrity.</li> <li>♦ Maintenance interval typically 1-3 years, or in response to reports of trail or resource damage or significant obstacles to managed use type and experience level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trail cleared to make available for use at earliest opportunity in use season</li> <li>- Typically, maintenance performed at least annually.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Maintenance performed at least annually, or as needed to meet posted conditions</li> <li>♦ Major damage or safety concerns (outside of UA conditions posted at trailhead) typically corrected or posted &lt;24 hours of notice</li> </ul>

Figure 12

Sample Maintenance Matrix  
(US Forest Service)



Benefits of an appropriately designed OHV park / training facility include:

- Protection of green space;
- Reduction of trespass on public / private lands;
- Contribution to local economy (e.g. tourism destination);
- Opportunities for safety training;
- Environmental education; and
- Potential application within mine end-use rehabilitation

### **On - Trail Facilities**

A major component of the trail network from perspective of the overall trail experience will be on-trail facilities and amenities. Facilities and amenities such as rest stops, picnic areas, remote campsites, toilets, and historical/natural history interpretive markers are typically at trail intersections, vistas, water crossings, lakeshores and river crossings. These features add interest and variety to the overall trail experience of users. Maintenance service access must be considered when selecting the location of some of these facilities (e.g. toilets, campsites).

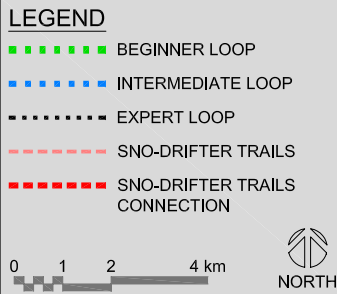
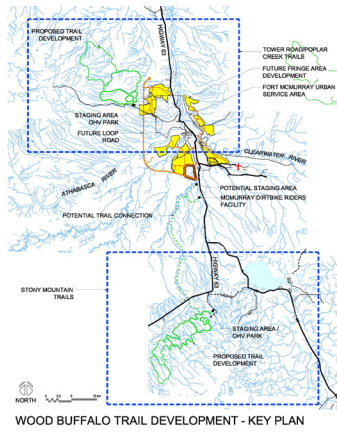
### **Emergency Access and Evacuation Considerations**

Another consideration while planning trails is access for emergency responders. Vehicle access may be possible for portions of the trail system, but bridge crossings or steep slopes may limit access along some trail segments. Locations for helicopter landing areas (e.g. STARS) may be required in inaccessible portions of the trail system.

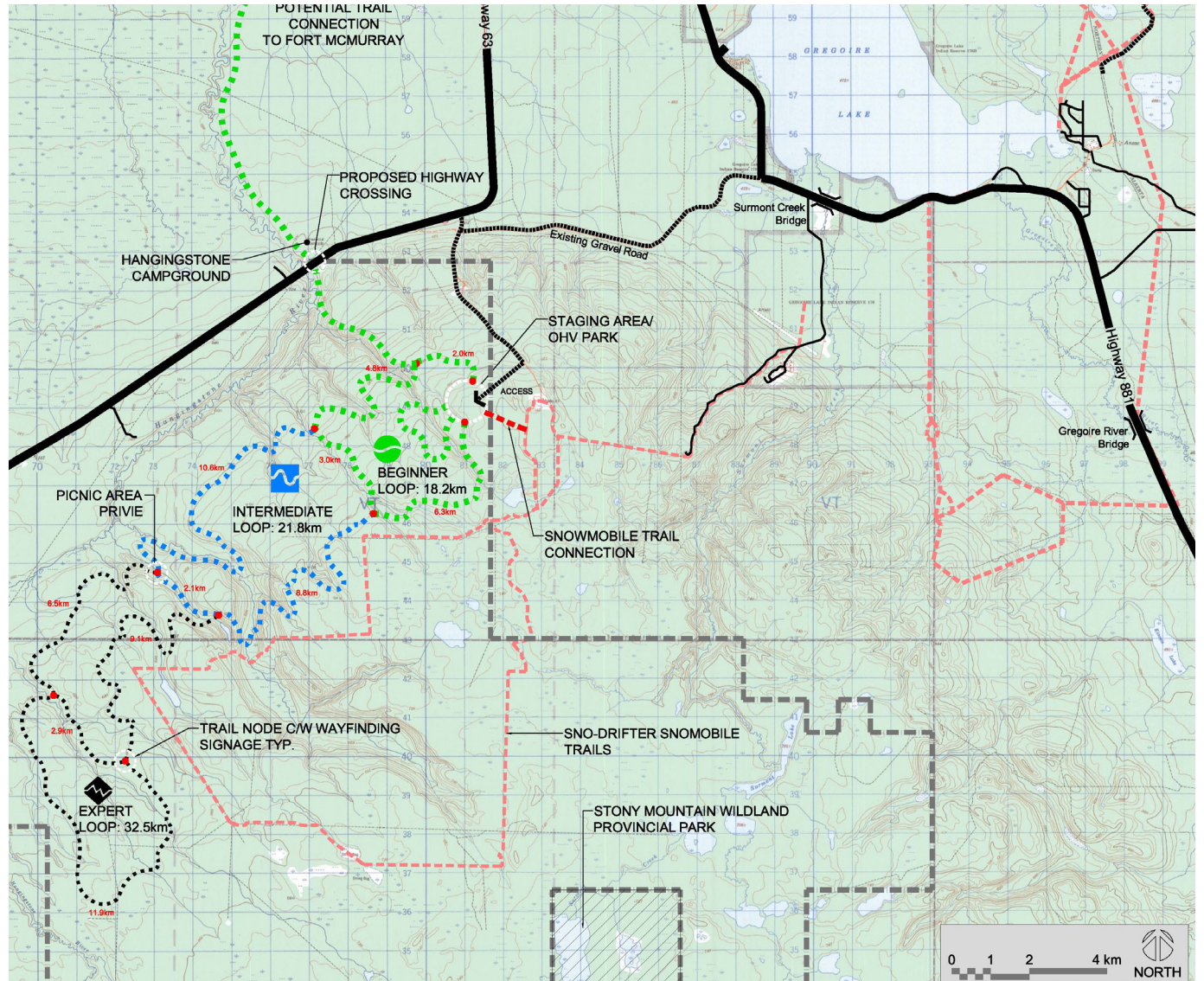
### **Signage**

Appropriate signage is a critical component of trail planning and design; signage is essential to provide important basic information needed for a safe trail experience. Effective signage can also lead users to destinations and keep them from leaving trails. In addition, signage can also add value to, and enhance the trail experience. Key types of signage requirements that need to be considered in the design of trail networks include:

- **Regulatory** - trail regulations, trail etiquette



**Figure 13**  
Conceptual trail development, Stony Mountain area





- **Information** - fixed information (e.g. reporting vandalism) and changing information (e.g. trail events).
- **Wayfinding** - directional / navigational information, route reinforcement
- **Trail Difficulty** - trail challenges and hazards, similar to systems used at downhill ski facilities
- **Interpretive** - Enriches the trail experience and reinforces environmental stewardship messages

In terms of a signage family, the following sign types / locations may be considered (Figure 8):

- **Trailhead Signage** - Located at trailheads and staging areas; may include wayfinding signage (e.g. overall trail map); regulatory signage and notice boards. Trailhead signage may also incorporate donor recognition panels as appropriate.
- **Wayfinding Signage**- Located at trail nodes and intersections; wayfinding signage is typically hierarchical to suit the trail network - at main trail intersections **primary wayfinding signage** may include trail blazes (e.g. route reinforcement), maps, trail hazard information and a notice board (e.g. trail closures). **Secondary wayfinding signage** often reinforces wayfinding (e.g. distance markers) and mark ancillary loops and / or side trails (e.g. to lookout points).
- **Trail Difficulty / Interpretive Signage / Markers** - Typically located as needed on trails or at trail intersections and nodes. Markers may also acknowledge donors (e.g. 'Adopt-a-Trail' contributors).

The establishment of a signage program for OHV trails should include the consideration of:

- **Size and location**, e.g. necessary setbacks;
- **Visual identity** to complement trail branding and related initiatives (e.g. 'Respect The Land');
- **Graphic standards** with due consideration to legibility of type at OHV speeds;
- **Construction methods and materials** with due consideration to ease of transport and installation;
- **Maintenance procedures**

### Access Control



As noted in 3.5, the RMWB has experimented with, and continues to consider, various means of access control to limit OHV trespass in parks, open spaces and trails, including post and rail fencing, knockdown bollards, concrete jersey barriers, Lock-Blocks, and boulders.

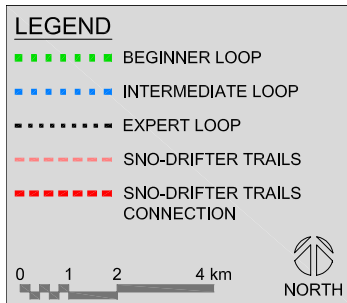
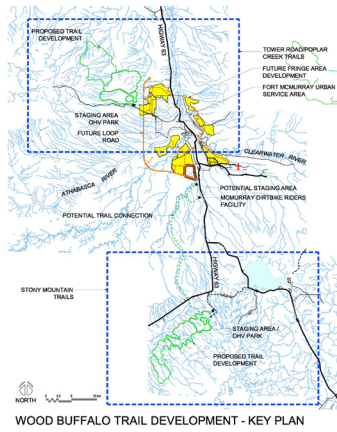
In **park areas**, such as Syncrude Timberlea Athletic Park, post and rail fence continues to be an effective option, though access is limited to key points. The RMWB has recently been experimenting with bollards used alone (spaced accordingly), which for a small premium, offers greater user access and is therefore deserving of greater use.

At **access points** to parks and trails, bollards continue to provide a high degree of access control; though as noted previously, the commonly used knockdown bollards have two key drawbacks: 1) the bollards remain down when locks are opened or cut; and 2) the bollards, particularly when used in pairs, can pose a hazard to other users (eg. cyclists).

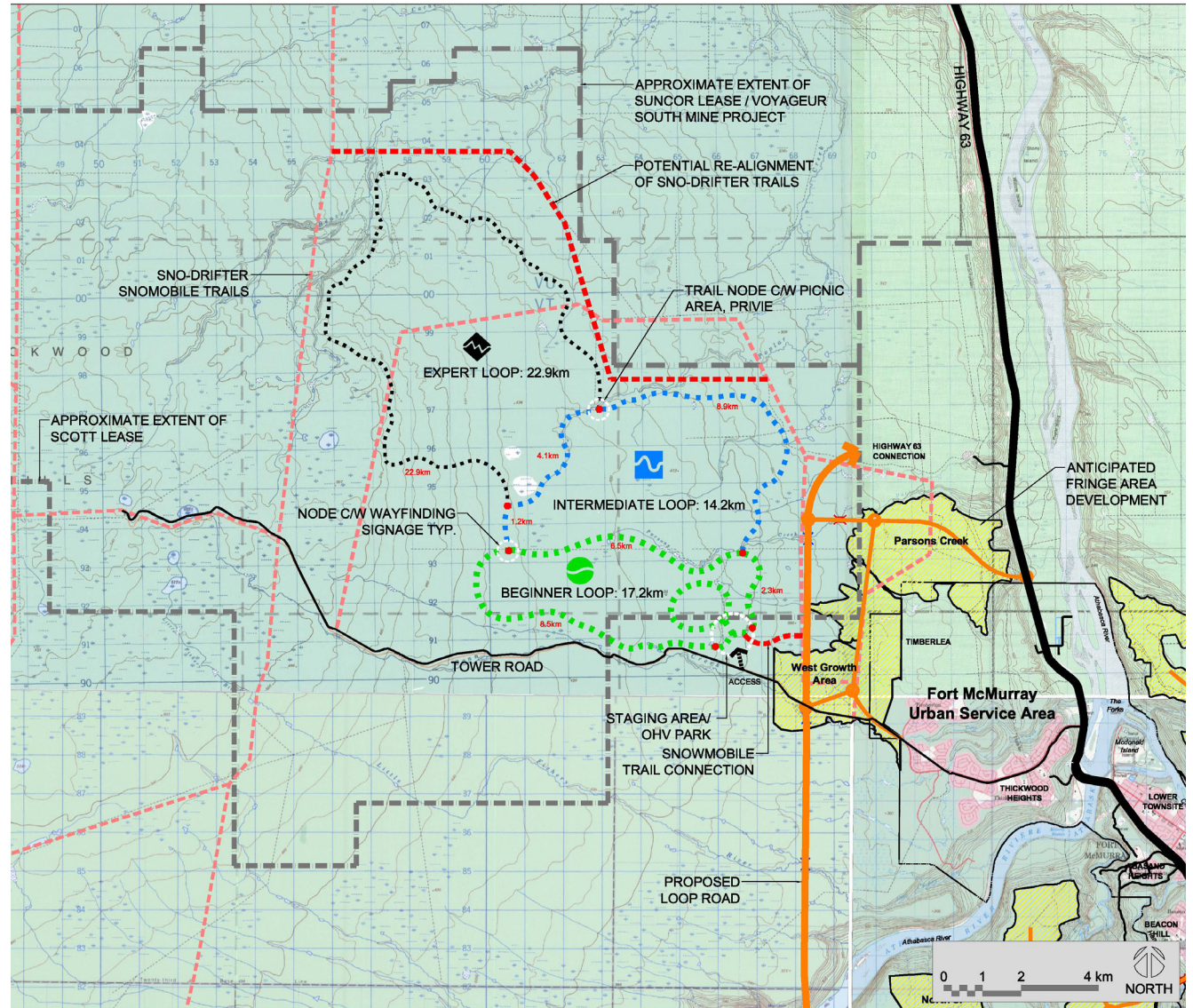
There is an opportunity to revisit the current use of bollards , including:

- Retrofit existing bollards, and modify the design of future bollards, to 1) include collars around locks to limit ability to cut locks, and 2) include vertical flanges which could assist in temporarily raising bollards into place until such time that locks can be replaced (Figure 9).
- Rethinking the use of bollards and access control, within the context of other trail users, such as cyclists (Figure 10). This could include a) adding striping to pathways for better channelization around bollards and avoid potential collisions between users; b) replacing double bollards with single, swinging gates, combined with striping or landscaping (or both) for better channelization; and c) prioritizing the use of horizontally pivoting 'T-type' bollards, recently added to the RMWB Engineering Servicing Standards, and commonly used in other Alberta Municipalities. These bollards cannot be knocked over, and therefore continue to offer some degree of access control if locks are cut. There may also be an opportunity to work with manufacturers to 'spring-load' bollards to always return to a 'closed' position.

Within **open spaces** along roadways and greenbelts, the main challenge is protecting open space and trail assets



**Figure 14**  
Conceptual trail development, Parson's  
Creek Area





and users while respecting highway design parameters (eg. clear distances) and limiting the amount of bollards and / or post and rail fencing. Based on some recent successes in the community, there are opportunities to use bollards, boulders and other landscape features which define a safe zone for open space and trail users, and push OHVs towards the roadway edge, increasing the likelihood of apprehension by RCMP and By-law (Figure 11).



### 9.3 TRAIL MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Effective and responsive maintenance of trails is critical in ensuring a safe, fun and ultimately satisfying OHV user experience. Given that a significant focus of trail management is the maintenance of particular trail standards (e.g. trail tread, horizontal and vertical clearance, slope profiles, etc.), identifying maintenance standards can be thought of as a direct and logical extension of establishing trail design standards (see 9.1.2).

Considerations in and requirements for establishing trail maintenance standards include:

- Developing condition surveys - forms used to track maintenance requirements - as well as a process to conduct them; e.g. by Trail Stewards (see 11.3) as part of routine trail inspections;
  - Gathering necessary background information such as maps, trail logs, traffic count information and completed condition surveys;
  - Identifying acceptable maintenance standards - usually as described in trail design standards;
  - Assigning maintenance activities and frequencies to meet acceptable standards – based on type of trail, traffic counts, etc.;
- (US Forest Service – [americantrails.org](http://americantrails.org))

Sample trail maintenance standards, presented in matrix form, are illustrated below.

Ultimately, a simple trail maintenance matrix becomes a useful and easily understandable tool for both RWMB staff and:

- Trail Stewards (see 11.3);
- OHV user groups volunteering in annual or semi-annual clean up events;
- Corporate business units and teams taking part in team building exercises; and
- Individuals, groups, businesses, etc., taking part in 'Adopt-A-Trail' - type programs.



### Collecting Trail Fees

In discussions with user group representatives, the collection of trail access fees was seen as an excellent opportunity to fund both trail maintenance and construction. Though the McMurray Sno-Drifters presently sell passes (with a portion of the revenue earmarked for trail maintenance), the collection of fees for accessing public lands in Alberta is generally not allowed. However, experience in other locations has shown that users are more willing to contribute when donations are understood to directly support trail maintenance.

One strategy which has not yet been fully explored is the collection of fees to access staging areas. SRD must be consulted on this strategy, particularly if the area is located on public land.

The benefit of collecting fees to assist with trail management must be weighed against the potential negative perception of user fees by OHV riders. Given that a key objective of the Master Plan is to direct legitimate users towards legitimate trail facilities (e.g. out of the Urban Service Area), a more suitable approach may be to suggest a donation amount with a clear understanding that any donations will be applied towards trail maintenance.

## 9.4 TRAIL DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL - FORT McMURRAY AREA

To explore these concepts of OHV trail planning and advance the potential development of OHV trails in the Fort McMurray area, conceptual trail alignments were explored. As a result of discussions with user groups, as well as a review of current best practices, conceptual trail alignments were explored which embodied the following principles:

- A primarily focus on ATVs, and secondarily dirt bikes, given that snowmobilers have developed and maintain their own network of trails;
- A separation of ATV and snowmobile trails to reduce conflict; the only shared facilities to be staging areas / access points (and potential OHV parks);
- Trails to be close enough to allow for day use from Fort McMurray, yet far enough to require trailering;
- Trails to be a minimum length of 50 km to allow full days of riding;



- Stacked loops are preferred to minimize overall land footprint, and incorporate a range of difficulty levels;
- Trails to be developed on large, contiguous lease holdings to simplify approval processes;
- Trails to have appropriate road access and allocation for staging area / OHV park / training facility development;
- Networks to respect environmental / ecological constraints (e.g. wetland areas and moose / caribou zones); and
- Networks to minimize possible impacts on existing historical and traditional use lands.

Based on input from user groups, options for potential trail development were identified both south and north of Fort McMurray: In the Stony Mountain area, south of Highway 881, on lands under lease by Petro-Canada, and north of Parson's Creek, west of Highway 63, on lands under lease by Scott.

#### 9.4.1 POTENTIAL STONY MOUNTAIN TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

The opportunity for trail development in the Stony Mountain area utilizes a stacked loop system, accessed from a staging area (and potentially an OHV park - see 9.2) potentially shared with McMurray Sno-Drifters in the Maqua Lake area. Additionally, there is potential access to this trail network via a trail following the Hangingstone River from a location near the McMurray Dirt Riders' Facility south of Fort McMurray.

This potential trail network features:

- Proximity to provincial camping amenities (Gregoire Lake, Hangingstone) and Recreation Areas (Maqua Lake);
- Proximity of existing trails and amenities (Sno-Drifters), and the potential to jointly develop facilities;
- Existing relationships between the Sno-Drifters and Petro-Canada can become the basis for negotiating new trail alignments;
- Proximity of other recreational amenities - McMurray Dirt Riders Track, radio controlled airplane club, fish ponds.
- Potential use of Dirt Riders facility for safety and other demonstrations and events; and



	TRAIL AMENITIES			TRAIL USE		ENFORCEMENT	COMMUNITY	PLANNING		
Communication Dimension	Existing Trail Amenities	Planned Trail Amenities	Trail Mgmt / Maintenance	Safe + Respectful Riding	Environmental Responsibility	RMWB By-laws	Traffic Safety Act	User Groups	Events + Programs	Master Plan Development
Description	What trails exist in the Fort McMurray area	What trails are being planned and how to get involved	How users can volunteer time and donate resources to keep trails maintained	Safe riding practices and being respectful of other users	Being mindful of the environmental impact of OHV use on the landscape	What are the limits to OHV use within the communities of Wood Buffalo	What are the rules regarding OHV use in the province of Alberta	What user groups exist in the community and what are the benefits of membership	What things are going on in the community of interest to OHV users	How is the plan being implemented and updated to remain relevant
Current communication initiatives, mechanisms and partners	Maps (user groups)	RMWB capital projects are typically advertised through website, newspaper		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education campaigns (Northern Lights, AIT)</li> <li>• In-school programs (user groups)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education campaigns (ASRD)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brochures (By-law / RCMP)</li> <li>• RMWB website</li> <li>• Community outreach (By-law / RCMP)</li> </ul>	Community outreach	User group websites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• User group websites</li> <li>• Radio, newspaper</li> </ul>	n/a
Key Supporting Initiatives				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety training / safe rides</li> </ul>						
Planned communication initiatives				RMWB Communications Plan / Ride Right						
Key partnership opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• User groups</li> <li>• Fort McMurray tourism</li> </ul>	ASRD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASRD</li> <li>• User groups / trail stewards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northern Lights</li> <li>• AIT</li> <li>• User groups / trail stewards</li> <li>• SCWB</li> <li>• OSSA</li> <li>• Industry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASRD</li> <li>• User groups / trail stewards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By-law</li> <li>• RCMP</li> <li>• User groups / trail stewards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By-law</li> <li>• RCMP</li> <li>• User groups / trail stewards</li> </ul>	User groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• User groups</li> <li>• Fort McMurray tourism</li> </ul>	

**Figure 15**  
OHV Communication Streams



- Future potential opportunity for rail-to-trail conversion, with links southward to Lac la Biche, Lakeland Provincial Park / PRA, and the Iron Horse Trail and Trans Canada / Trans Canada Snowmobile Trail.

#### 9.4.2 POTENTIAL PARSON'S CREEK TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

The opportunity for trail development in the Parson's Creek area also utilizes a stacked loop system, accessed from a staging area (and potentially an OHV park) potentially shared with McMurray Sno-Drifters accessed from Tower Road west of Timberlea. The land base identified for potential trail development is immediately south of the proposed Suncor Voyageur South Mine site. As such, these lands fall outside of the Mineable Oil Sands Strategy (MOSS) boundary.

This potential trail network features:

- Proximity of existing trails and amenities (Sno-Drifters); however, in their current configuration a conflict exists and ideally a portion of the snowmobile trail would have to be realigned; otherwise, there is excellent potential to jointly develop facilities;
- Proximity to the proposed Voyageur Mine site. The potential trail system provides a good land use buffer between Fort McMurray and this industrial development, and furthermore, upon the future closure of the mine, the opportunity exists to expand the trails into the Suncor lease area as part of the end-use rehabilitation process.

The main issue that exists with this potential trail network is the proximity of trails to the Urban Service Area. While the relative proximity of the trails to the community creates a convenient amenity, there is a significant likelihood that many of the current problems of OHV users accessing trails through Fort McMurray on their machines would arise again.

#### 9.4.3 OTHER TRAIL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to the two potential trail networks identified above, there are other opportunities for trail develop-



ment, mainly:

- Stacked / satellite loops in the Hangingstone / Horse River, accessible by Highway 63 and /or the proposed future ring road, providing access west to Grand Rapids Wildland Provincial Park; and
- Over the longer term, trail loops developed in partnership with oil sands companies as part of end-use rehabilitation processes.

## 9.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

*In order to establish the framework for the development of legitimate OHV trails and amenities, the emphasis in the short term should be to address immediate issues and opportunities, and build upon existing strengths to lay the groundwork for long term, sustainable initiatives.*

- **Initiate the development of new OHV trails and staging areas north and south of Fort McMurray.** Identify conceptual trail alignments, access requirements (e.g. staging areas) as well as appropriate consultation parameters (e.g. identify affected users and regulatory agencies). As appropriate, coordinate route plans with updates to municipal land use plans (e.g. RMWB Municipal Development Plan).
- **Develop comprehensive trail planning and design standards.** Evaluate existing trails in the region (e.g. Sno-Drifter trails) and work with the Province of Alberta (e.g. through the Stantec Report) as a basis for establishing planning and design standards.
- **Develop a comprehensive trail signage plan.** This plan should ultimately coordinate all trail signage within the region, including that used on non-motorized (e.g. Birchwood) trails. As appropriate, work with other agencies and partners to integrate recognizable communication messages (e.g. ASRD's 'Respect the Land' program).
- **Regularly review the Engineering Servicing Standards to continually improve access control measures.** Explore the redesign of existing access controls, and introduce new controls, which will provide greater OHV



access control within open spaces and rights-of-way.

- **Continue to manage existing staging areas.** Maintain and regulate existing staging areas, with appropriate amenities and signage (see 9.2) until such time new staging areas are created south and / or north of Fort McMurray. Ensure current and future planning initiatives, including the Lower Townsite and Waterways ARPs and master planning for Snye Park Horse Pasture Park adequately consider snowmobile access and appropriate year round amenities.
- **Initiate a feasibility study to develop an OHV park / training facility.** As part of the trail planning process, identify possible locations, spatial / programmatic requirements, and potential funding strategies / corporate sponsorships. A critical consideration for such a facility should be the incorporation of a complementary environmental education program and / or centre.
- **Explore potentials to collect fees for trail access and usage.**
- **Develop comprehensive maintenance procedures.** In conjunction with local user groups, identify current maintenance issues and management techniques as a basis for a more comprehensive maintenance program. For greatest efficiency, the program should ultimately be developed in conjunction with trail planning and design standards.

***Other recommendations related to trail planning and management, that for clarity are addressed elsewhere in this Master Plan document, include:***

- **Maintain and strengthen relationships with oil sands companies to coordinate future development.** This is a significant requirement within the context of the Master Plan and it is critical to ensure this function is incorporated into a trail advisory group (see 12.1).
- **Identify the need to include other trail users and stakeholders in ongoing management.** Depending on the nature of future trail planning and design, it may be necessary to ensure that representatives of other trail users (primarily non-motorized users) are represented within a trail advisory group (see 12.1).



## 10.0 EDUCATING USERS AND COMMUNICATING KEY MESSAGES

*The review of existing conditions revealed that in the Wood Buffalo region there exists some very good educational resources, a number of groups involved in developing and sharing information, as well as exceptional opportunities for additional partnerships. However, to date there has not been a coordinated approach to managing these varied resources and realizing their full potential.*

*In preparing this master plan, it is clear that there are many streams of communication to be considered, ranging from trail development and management to enforcement to master plan development and implementation. It is critical that a comprehensive communications strategy be developed that ensures all of these streams are adequately addressed. This comprehensive strategy needs to recognize that some initiatives have taken place, or are currently in development, and will fill an immediate need if resolved and implemented in a timely manner. At the same time, more complex initiatives, benefiting from the careful coordination of various partners, are more long term in nature and to be planned for as such.*

### 10.1 COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING - THE '3-C' APPROACH

As a background to understanding the opportunities for a comprehensive communications strategy in the Fort McMurray context, it is useful to consider communications planning as an integrated process involving the cultivation, creation and communication of messages. This '3-C' approach includes -

- **Cultivation** - Gaining an understanding of the audiences, their desired behaviors and the types of messages that will resonate with audiences, yielding the desired behaviors;
- **Creation** - Refining and shaping the features identified above into effective communications pieces; and



Above

Potential trail branding

- **Communication** - Putting communications pieces into action, with a full understanding of mechanisms used by the local communications partners. For example, a significant opportunity exists to partner with oil sands companies to utilize corporate safety programs and internal communication mechanisms (e.g. newsletters) to communicate appropriate messages to key audiences.

## 10.2 CULTIVATING A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

As described above, the first step in communications planning is beginning to identify the various audiences and potential messages. Based on both the review of existing conditions and a consideration of the Master Plan and its scope, a number of communication streams have been identified. These streams are illustrated and described in Figure 15.

## 10.3 CAPITALIZING ON EXISTING INITIATIVES

As identified in the review of existing conditions, efforts have been made to prepare and deliver basic information to users and the public regarding OHV use in the community. The preparation and delivery of this information should continue; however, there is a significant opportunity for user groups to develop communications materials jointly. Working together in this manner increases efficiencies but also provides a means to share information and knowledge, project a common front, and raise awareness regarding conflicts between user groups.

### Trail Maps

RMWB Communications has previously worked with the Sno-Drifters to update and improve their trail map. There is an opportunity for RMWB to also work with the ATV Riders and Dirt Riders to develop their mapping resources, and ultimately prepare one map combining trail and amenity information for all clubs. These maps should be prepared in both electronic and hard copy format, for distribution via the internet as well as through local sources (e.g. OHV Dealers, Registries).



### **Information Brochures**

As noted previously, RMWB By-law / RCMP has prepared and distributed brochures for Anzac, Gregoire Lake Estates and Saprae Creek, which describe by-laws regulating OHV use in these areas. Not only is there a need to produce a brochure for all of the communities within the region (including Fort McMurray), but there is an opportunity to integrate trail maps, club information, as well as links to key partners (e.g. ASRD). These brochures may be produced individually or be integrated with trail maps (described above). These maps should be prepared in both electronic and hard copy format, for distribution via the internet as well as through local sources (e.g. OHV Dealers, Registries).

### **Newsletter**

Currently, the Sno-Drifters prepare a monthly newsletter, which provides information on trails, upcoming events, President's message, etc. As with the trail mapping, there may be significant benefits to pursuing the development of a newsletter jointly by all user groups in the region. A newsletter provides a significant opportunity to provide more focused, thoughtful messages (e.g. environmental stewardship). With broad distribution (e.g. newspaper insert), a newsletter can engage the public in issues and successes in OHV management (including the implementation of the Master Plan).

## **10.4 STREAMLINING COMMUNICATION DELIVERY**

A key issue identified in the Fort McMurray context is the number of communications pieces in existence, and an equal number of delivery mechanisms. In order to maximize the impact of these various initiatives, it is critical to explore the creation of a single portal or gateway.

### **Web Site Portal**

With regard to OHV use, the RMWB presently uses its corporate website to communicate OHV by-laws as well as information describing the Urban Service Area boundaries. For the foreseeable future, the RMWB should also be a



main portal for trail maps, brochures, newsletters, user group information, links (e.g. to communications partners), and the Master Plan itself (including feedback mechanisms and information related to upcoming consultation).

As the implementation of the plan proceeds, there is an opportunity to create a separate website with distinctive branding. With a development of a unique site there is an opportunity to create a more engaging and interactive environment, with possibilities ranging from GPS track download to a message board to a user forum.

A user forum provides an opportunity to share ideas and concerns related to OHV use and management in the community. If properly managed, a user forum can provide an excellent opportunity to raise, discuss and ultimately resolve important issues and conflicts.

## 10.5 COORDINATING AND SUPPORTING THE WORK OF COMMUNICATIONS PARTNERS

As indicated previously, good work in the area of communications has been undertaken by a number of different partners within the community. In addition to providing the opportunity to access this information from a single website portal, there is also a need to coordinate and support the work of these groups. For example, extensive energies are often directed into the development of excellent communications materials, but resources do not exist for a sustained delivery of the messages within the community.

Supporting the work of various communications partners and attempting to find synergies in the delivery of messages speaks to the need to establish a working group of communications stakeholders. Representation within this group needs to include key partners (e.g. Alberta Health Services, ASRD, etc.) and be fully supported by the technical expertise of the RMWB Communications department. This working group should also be appropriately represented within any Trail Advisory Group established to manage OHV resources / plan implementation (see 12.1).

In addition to existing partners, there is a significant opportunity to engage with other groups in the community involved in similar endeavors in order to realize maximum opportunities:



### **Safe Communities Wood Buffalo**

SCWB is well positioned to coordinate the delivery of messaging around appropriate OHV use. Programs such as the Family Safety Day, held each June in Fort McMurray, represent an excellent opportunity to provide information to the public. In addition, there is clearly a potential for SCWB to share their expertise with user groups to plan and hold safety events (e.g. safety rides, International Snowmobile Safety Week events). Equally significant, the networking role of SCWB can facilitate specific communication partnerships, such as with oil sands companies (see below).

### **Oil Sands Safety Association**

As previously identified, the OSSA is primarily concerned with industrial safety and training within the region; however, the group fully recognizes the importance of safety outside the normal workday, and to this end, the group communicates messages within local media (e.g. regarding seatbelt use). The OSSA should be engaged not only as a group with a potential reach to key audiences, but as a key liason with oil sands companies and the communication mechanisms they have available as part of corporate safety policies (see below).

### **Oil Sands Companies**

With regard to communicating appropriate OHV use, the development of the Master Plan can take particular advantage of the oil sands industry. A large percentage of residents work directly for the oil sands companies or their contractors, and these companies typically have a particular interest in health and safety (as evidenced in well developed and well promoted safety policies). A logical opportunity exists to partner with these companies through organizations such as the OSSA and utilize existing corporate mechanisms (e.g. company newsletters) to communicate key messages regarding safe and sustainable OHV use within the Fort McMurray area.



## 10.6 OTHER STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS INITIATIVES

### RCMP Community Outreach

As indicated previously, the Fort McMurray RCMP detachment has recently engaged a community outreach role, working with the public to develop community-based programs responding to various issues. With regard to safe, fun and sustainable OHV use in the Fort McMurray area, a significant role within this outreach function would be to tailor messages at specific audiences, such as school-aged children. In this instance, for example, it may be appropriate for the RCMP to invite a well-known local or provincial role model to speak to an audience on appropriate OHV use.

### RMWB Communications Planning and Coordination

As previously discussed, RMWB Communications has initiated an annual communications plan to address OHV use in around the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray. As part of a '3-C' approach (See 10.1), it is critical that the department work closely with communications stakeholders and partners within the region. This collaboration is necessary to:

- Identify existing resources and delivery mechanisms (including synergies and redundancies);
- Identify / evaluate previous communication initiatives; and
- Identify audiences and fully explore and articulate meaningful messages

One format for this collaboration to take place is within a communications working group (see above). Within this group, the RMWB Communications is well positioned to assume a leadership role, coordinating the work of the group and its constituent members. In addition, RMWB Communications can offer considerable support to the group through its expertise and technical skills. As an example, if communications partners pursued the use of outdoor media (e.g. billboards), RMWB is well positioned through its municipal contacts to facilitate such a project.



### Master Plan / Trail Development Branding

While not a critical step in its own right, the development of a unique visual identity or brand (or brands, as it may be) is a valuable means to raise visibility and awareness of the coordinated, balanced approach towards managing OHV issues and opportunities in the region. Furthermore, the recognizable brand can gain value outside of the Wood Buffalo region, assisting not only in tourism development and marketing, but in also in efforts by user groups (and potentially a user advisory group) to work with other user groups, provincial advocacy organizations and the government.

## 10.7 RECOMMENDATIONS

*In order to establish effective communication strategies, the emphasis in the short term should be to address immediate issues and opportunities, and build upon existing strengths to lay the groundwork for long term, sustainable initiatives.*

- **Develop basic OHV user information resources.** These resources should include trail and facility maps for all OHV user groups, as well as community-specific information related to by-laws.
- **Ensure a web presence for key information related to OHV use and management.** In the immediate future, the RMWB website can fulfill this function, with maps, information, links, as well as the Master Plan itself; however, over time a separate website with a unique identity should be developed, with interactive features, message board, user forum, etc.
- **Establish a regularly produced, broadly distributed newsletter.** The newsletter should be jointly developed by all OHV user groups, and available broadly in electronic and print format (e.g. as an annual or biannual newspaper insert) to actively engage the public in the implementation of the Master Plan).
- **Develop a formal program for community outreach RCMP / By-law.** This program should be tailored to different audiences (general public, school children, etc) and contain appropriate messages and materials.



Feedback mechanisms should be built into this program to evaluate its effectiveness and continually track and monitor public perceptions related to OHV management.

- **Advance the RMWB annual communication campaign.** Take particular care in developing key messages with consideration of other communications programs and messages.
- **Develop a recognizable image or 'brand' for the Master Plan initiative.**

*Other recommendations related to education and communication, that for clarity are addressed elsewhere in this Master Plan document, include:*

- **Establish a communications working group.** Under the leadership of RMWB Communications, establish a working group to coordinate and support the work of communications partners. This group should also seek partnership opportunities with other key stakeholders in the community. It is critical that this function be incorporated into a trail advisory group (see 12.1).



## 11.0 CREATING EFFECTIVE ENFORCEMENT STRATEGIES FOR OHV USE

*Illegal OHV use in the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray is common and causes numerous complaints related to nuisance, property damage and personal injury. Existing municipal by-laws are generally appropriate, and the RMWB is committed to dialoguing with the community to ensure by-laws are understood and complied with.*

*The development of legitimate options for OHV users and the communication of key messages related to OHV use are part of a balanced approach which, among a number of key objectives, are intended to limit illegal use in the community. However, the need to enforce municipal by-laws and provincial laws remains, and it is critical to have effective strategies and appropriate resources in place.*

*As trails are expanded and new trails are developed in rural areas around Fort McMurray, by-laws will be required to ensure safe, fun and respectful OHV use. The experiences of other communities has shown that one of the most effective means to enforce these by-laws is through a combination of hard and soft enforcement strategies, including such initiatives as a Trail Steward program.*

### 11.1 CURRENT RMWB BY-LAWS AND ENFORCEMENT NEEDS

The review of the current RMWB By-law 98/078 (prohibiting OHV use within the Urban Service Area) identified only minor shortcomings. Three of the most significant issues were trailering over short distances in residential areas; trailering in public rights-of-way; and snow clearing on public sidewalks.

With regard to trailering over short distances within existing residential areas (e.g. Abasand Heights), this issue will be largely addressed once new staging areas are constructed outside of the Urban Service Area. Until such time, the issue will remain and perhaps best dealt with through continued outreach and education, including



appropriate signage (see 9.2).

With regard to trailering in a public right-of-way (which is often required in areas of Fort McMurray with smaller lots and townhouses) and clearing of public sidewalks with ATVs, these issues should be monitored as part of a regular consultation program by RCMP / By-law. At a minimum, this consultation should involve user groups and key stakeholders. Should expectations and values within the community dictate a change to current regulations, the by-law can be updated with relative ease. With specific regard to snow clearing, precedents from other communities may provide a useful template upon which to update the by-law. Furthermore, any changes to the by-law to accommodate this issue may be best made in a comprehensive manner in conjunction with the preparation of future snow clearing and / or property standards by-laws.

With regard to existing OHV by-laws within Anzac / Gregoire Lake, Saprae Creek and Fort Chipewyan, it is critical for RMWB to regularly monitor OHV use in relation to expectations and values within these communities.

In addition to a regular program of public outreach and consultation, it is important that RCMP and RMWB By-law routinely monitor enforcement strategies and successes from an internal perspective. As part of annual operational reviews, it is important to dialogue with other jurisdictions in Alberta to monitor best practices with regard to enforcement strategies, fines and penalties, education initiatives, etc. Finally, as part of this ongoing internal evaluation, it is important to evaluate staff complements and make adjustments as necessary as part of ongoing budget processes.

## 11.2 ESTABLISHING NEW BY-LAWS FOR TRAILS

Creating effective by-laws will be a necessary complement to the establishment of new OHV trails outside of the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray. The best practice review of other municipalities revealed that trail by-laws can address:

- The operation and insurance of OHVs in accordance with the Traffic Safety Act.
- The operation of OHVs at reasonable speeds and / or in respect of posted speed limits.
- The use of safety helmets.



- The operation of OHVs in a careful manner with due consideration to other trail users, including yielding the right of way to (in the case of multi-use trails) non-motorized trail users, and keeping to the right when encountering approaching OHVs.
- The prohibition / limiting of hunting and other incompatible uses.
- The protection of natural environments and wildlife from disturbance from trail users.
- Littering, vandalism and damage of trail amenities / structure / signage / access control devices.
- The identification of penalties and fees.
- Timing restrictions (e.g. seasons of use)
- The prohibition of "off-trail" use
- Temporary closures for environmental reasons (e.g. flooding, wet ground conditions).
- The use of special event permits for group activities (e.g. poker rallies, races)

### 11.3 ENFORCEMENT STRATEGIES - DEVELOPING A TRAIL STEWARD PROGRAM

Even with by-laws and regulations carefully crafted to reflect the concerns of trail users and the realities of the natural environment, there remains a need to ensure that effective enforcement strategies are in place. In response, groups and communities elsewhere in Alberta, and across Canada, have successfully established trail steward programs. These programs provide a unique opportunity to provide 'soft' enforcement - stewards cannot enforce by-laws, but can instead communicate to users what the by-laws are - through modelling appropriate, respectful behavior. Based on a review of similar programs elsewhere, the potential functions of trail stewards can include:

- Providing basic information on the trail (e.g. amenities, directions) and appropriate trail use and etiquette;
- Providing information related to governing regulations and by-laws;
- Providing updated information on trail conditions;
- Assisting OHV users with minor first aid and vehicle repair;
- Serving a crime deterrence / prevention role through increased trail visibility;
- Undertaking minor trail maintenance and repair as needed;
- Relaying information related to trail conditions and maintenance to RMWB staff; and
- Collecting donations for trail maintenance and upkeep.



Trail steward programs from other jurisdictions provide useful models for the development of a similar program in the Wood Buffalo region. These models illustrate the need to identify:

- Overall Mission Statement and Code of Conduct;
- Powers, roles and responsibilities of Trail Stewards;
- Procedures and policies, including relevant by-laws and regulations;
- Necessary promotional materials;
- Required trail equipment (e.g. vests / clothing) and
- Administrative processes (e.g. scheduling volunteers).

Many of these requirements can be addressed by RMWB; however, the Nova Scotia example illustrates that the full potential of these programs can be realized through partnerships with provincial organizations, government and local user groups. In the Fort McMurray context, additional partnerships can also be sought with the Alberta SRD Backcountry Guardians program.

## 11.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

*In order to establish effective enforcement strategies, the emphasis in the short term should be to address immediate issues and opportunities, and build upon existing strengths to lay the groundwork for long term, sustainable initiatives.*

- **Update the current RMWB by-law 98 / 078 for the Urban Service area as appropriate.** At a minimum, the by-law should be updated to reflect the changes in staging areas. Based on staff capacity, the opportunity should be taken to work with user groups to identify and introduce minor changes (e.g. trailering on public-rights-of-way). More significant changes, such as provisions for snow clearing by ATVs, should be undertaken as a result of a more comprehensive evaluation process (see below), including the regular monitoring of infractions, consultation with user groups / public, and / or the drafting of complementary by-laws (e.g. snow clearing by-law, property standards by-law).



- **Initiate a trail by-law.** A comprehensive trail by-law may originate as a Code of Behavior for trail users, developed in conjunction with the Sno-Drifters for use on their trail network. As trails are developed in the region, and issues surrounding the applicability of by-laws on Crown land are better understood, a formal trail by-law can be established.
- **Initiate a Trail Steward program.** Begin development of a Trail Steward program by drafting a terms of reference; preparing resource and support materials (e.g. maps, Code of Behavior); establishing a basic organizational structure (e.g. scheduling procedures); and developing a preliminary identity to promote the program. A more formalized Trail Steward program (e.g. with a unique identity) should be pursued once a Trails Advisory Group is formed (see 12.1).
- **Actively work with Alberta SRD to ensure Backcountry Guardians monitor public areas in the region.** Affected areas include the fish ponds / day use areas along Highway 63. Over time, work in partnership with newly established trail stewards on trails around Fort McMurray.

***Other recommendations related to enforcement, that for clarity are addressed elsewhere in this Master Plan document, include:***

- **Continue RCMP / RMWB By-law outreach efforts in rural hamlets and gather input on the appropriateness of current regulations.** This activity should be incorporated into a formal community outreach program (see 10.6).
- **Ensure regular operational reviews by RCMP / By-law are comprehensive in nature.** All municipal departments should ensure that their capacities, processes and budgets allow for internal reviews in conjunction with the ongoing evaluation of the master plan (see 12.3). RCMP and By-law should also regularly dialogue with enforcement agencies in other jurisdictions in Alberta.



## 12.0 EVALUATING AND MONITORING OHV MANAGEMENT

*As has been previously discussed, there are a number of groups in the Fort McMurray area that are doing good work developing and maintaining OHV trails, developing and communicating messages on safe, fun and respectful OHV use, and enforcing provincial and municipal laws and by-laws. In addition, the Master Plan has identified a number of potential recommendations that build upon this work to date.*

*Significantly, the full potential of these present and future initiatives can only be realized through the coordinated efforts of the various user groups and stakeholders. These parties can assume a number of key responsibilities, including the ongoing evaluation and review of the Master Plan to ensure the Plan adequately reflects the needs and wishes of users, stakeholders and the public.*

### 12.1 ESTABLISHING A TRAIL ADVISORY GROUP

The most significant opportunity emerging from the master planning process is to establish a venue for various user groups and stakeholders to work together and become active participants in the ongoing development, implementation and evaluation of the Master Plan, as well as the general management of OHV facilities and programming.

A trail advisory group can take an active role in ongoing OHV management, including:

- Trail Management - operating a Trail Steward program; coordinating volunteer (e.g. corporate team building) efforts; establishing donor recognition programs (e.g. 'Adopt-a-Trail'); identifying management conflicts among different user groups and providing a forum for discussion and issue resolution.
- Communication - creating an identifiable image for the Master Plan initiative; managing information re-



sources specific to the group (e.g. website, newsletters); and coordinating strategic communication initiatives and partnerships (via a communications working group - see below).

- Programming - developing, promoting and hosting local OHV events (e.g. poker derbies, safety rides, camping opportunities).
- Advocacy - liaising with provincial advocacy groups, agencies and government; finding local champions (e.g. MLAs, MPs) to advocate for trail development and management.
- Strategic Partnerships - identifying and fostering strategic partnerships, in order to achieve strategic goals ranging from trail development to programming.
- Master Plan Evaluation - working with RMWB to continually monitor and update the Master Plan and its implementation strategy, including the establishment of yearly goals and budget requests to RMWB Regional Council as appropriate (see below).

## 12.2 TRAIL ADVISORY GROUP MODELS

A trail advisory group may be initially established by the RMWB to provide regular input on issues and opportunities as described in the Master Plan. At this early stage, the group may initiate activities such as the hosting of local events, the delivery of communications resources and / or the development of donor recognition programs. It would be appropriate that in these instances the Group receive technical support from RMWB staff.

Over the life of the Master Plan, the group may assume more complex roles and functions. In turn, it may be appropriate for the group to assume a stronger leadership role and in turn greater independence from the RMWB.

A useful model for the RMWB to consider is the Wood Buffalo 'Communities in Bloom' Committee. In this instance, a largely autonomous group, created by Regional Council, carries out tasks with the assistance and support of a dedicated RMWB staff person as well as RMWB staff in various program areas. Although various municipal de-



Unless noted, all photos have been provided by the Project Team.

The following references were used in the preparation of this report and serve as a good basis for further reading:

Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture. **Alberta Recreation Corridor and Trails Classification System**, 2008.

California State Parks Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation **Strategic Plan**, 2009.

Crimmins, Tom. **Management Guidelines for OHV Recreation**. National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council, 2006.

Fogg, George. **Park Guidelines for Off-Highway Vehicles**. National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council, 2002.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources **Trail Planning, Design and Development Guidelines**, 2007.

Warren, Natasha. **Developing Recreational Trails in Nova Scotia: Planning, Design, Construction, Maintenance and Management**. Province of Nova Scotia, n/d.



## APPENDIX A : RMWB BY-LAW 98 / 078

### BYLAW NO. 98/078

BEING A BYLAW OF THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF WOOD BUFFALO TO REGULATE THE USE OF OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLES WITHIN THE FORT McMURRAY URBAN SERVICE AREA OF THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF WOOD BUFFALO.

The Council of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, in the Province of Alberta, under and pursuant to the provisions of the Off-Highway Vehicle Act, being Chapter O-4 of the Revised Statutes of Alberta, 1980 and amendments thereto, duly assembled, hereby enacts as follows:

1. In this Bylaw:
  - (a) "Bylaw Officer" shall mean any Peace Officer as defined in the Off-Highway Vehicle Act or Bylaw Enforcement Officer of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo
  - (b) "Designated Route" shall mean any route outlined in Schedule "A" hereto annexed located within the Fort McMurray Urban Service Area.
  - (c) "Designated Area" shall mean any area within the boundaries of the Fort McMurray Urban Service Area of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo referenced in Schedule "B" hereto annexed.
  - (d) "Highway" shall mean highway as defined by the Highway Traffic Act, being Chapter H-7, R.S.A. 1980 and amendments thereto.
  - (e) "Off-Highway Vehicle" shall have the same meaning as defined in the Off-Highway Vehicle Act, being Chapter O-4, R.S.A. 1980 and amendments thereto.
  - (f) "Trapper" shall mean anyone registered as a Trapper with the Province of Alberta and the holder of such Trapper Certificate.
  - (g) "Fort McMurray Urban Service Area" shall mean that area within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo which represented the City of Fort McMurray prior to the amalgamation of the City of Fort McMurray with Improvement District No. 18.
3. Those areas listed in Schedule "B" attached to this Bylaw shall be considered "Designated Areas" and may be used for the operation of Off-Highway Vehicles as Staging Areas for the purpose of gaining access to areas outside of the boundaries of the Urban Service Area.

Bylaw No. 98/078  
Page 2 of 1

4. The Council of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo may, from time to time within its sole discretion, pass a resolution or resolutions removing or adding land to the Designated Route schedule and/or Designated Areas schedule.
5. No person, other than a Bylaw Officer, shall use or operate an Off-Highway Vehicle on any Highway, roadway, or any public land within the Fort McMurray Urban Service Area of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo except on land within a Designated Area or Designated Route, for the purposes set out in paragraphs 2 and 3 above, unless authorized by special permit issued by the Regional Clerk, or other officer authorized by the Council of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo to issue such special permit.
6. The Regional Clerk is hereby authorized to issue a "Special Permit" to a person or persons authorizing the use and operation of an Off-Highway Vehicle within an area other than a Designated Area or Designated Route, or authorizing the use or operation of an Off-Highway Vehicle on a Highway, and without limiting the generality of the foregoing, the Regional Clerk must issue a Special Permit to a Trapper, having duly completed an Affidavit in the form of Schedule "C".
7. No person other than a Bylaw Officer, shall operate an Off-Highway Vehicle in any Designated Area or any Designated Route, or other area within the Fort McMurray Urban Service Area of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo between the hours of 10:00 o'clock p.m. and 7:00 o'clock a.m. without a Special Permit.
8. When any person operates an Off-Highway Vehicle on a Highway in accordance with this By-Law, such person shall comply with all laws and regulations applying to the operation of a Motor Vehicle on a Highway including the provisions of the *Highway Traffic Act* Chapter H-7, R.S.A. 1980 and the *Motor Vehicle Administration Act* Chapter M-22, R.S.A. 1980 and amendments thereto and shall be subject to those penalties established by the above mentioned legislation for breach of the same.
9. Notwithstanding anything contained in this Bylaw:
  - (i) No person shall operate an Off-Highway Vehicle on a Highway unless that person holds an operators license as required by the provisions of the *Motor Vehicle Administration Act* 1980 Chapter M-22, R.S.A.
  - (ii) A By-Law Officer shall not be in violation of this By-Law by operating an Off-Highway Vehicle within the Urban Service Area of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.
10. Bylaw #86-01 is hereby repealed.



Bylaw No. 98/078  
Page 3 of 1

11. This Bylaw shall be passed and become effective when it receives third reading and is signed by the Mayor and Regional Clerk.

READ A FIRST TIME THIS 13<sup>th</sup> DAY OF OCTOBER, 1998.

READ A SECOND TIME THIS 24<sup>th</sup> DAY OF November, 1998.

READ A THIRD AND FINAL TIME THIS 24<sup>th</sup> DAY OF November, 1998.



partments undertake their own initiatives complementary to the goals of the Committee (e.g. litter pickup, street cleaning), the overall strategic direction for the Communities in Bloom program is determined and /or coordinated at the Committee level, on which RMWB is represented equally with other stakeholders. In this sense, the group (and its initiatives) are often perceived as unique and separate from the Municipality.

At the outset, the group should:

- Develop a Mission Statement to guide long term, strategic decision making. The Mission Statement should be largely consistent with the general goals of this Master Plan; e.g. to encourage safe, fun and sustainable OHV use;
- Develop a Terms of Reference to guide management processes;
- Establish standing committees and / or working groups as needed to coordinate with RMWB operations and / or manage specific program areas as appropriate (e.g. trail development, trail use, enforcement, community, planning);
- Focus specific attention on integrating communications functions (see 10.6) and strategic / corporate partnership development (e.g. to coordinate development of trails and amenities);
- Make a special effort to engage Alberta Sustainable Resource Development in the establishment of, and ongoing participation in, this group. As the manager of public lands, with the legislative tools to manage trails, ASRD can make a significant contribution to implementation of the OHV Master Plan.

### 12.3 EVOLVING THE MASTER PLAN

It is absolutely critical that the Master Plan undergoes regular review to ensure its vision, goals and objectives remain relevant to OHV users, key stakeholders and the public in the Wood Buffalo region. In this sense, the Master Plan must be considered as a living or 'evergreen' document by the RMWB, with mechanisms in place to solicit



regular feedback. The trail advisory group plays a key role in ensuring the timely and meaningful review of the Master Plan.

### **Creating a Living or 'Evergreen' Master Plan**

A living' or 'evergreen' document is one which is able to evolve over time to reflect the changing needs and requirements of OHV users, stakeholders and the public. In the case of this Master Plan, it is important that:

- The Master Plan clearly identifies those components to be evaluated; who is responsible for evaluation; a preferred evaluation method or model; and an evaluation schedule.
- The RMWB embraces regular evaluation cycles (e.g. every 3-5 years), and / or utilizes other consultation processes (e.g. RCMP Public Education Officer) in order to keep the Plan current and relevant.
- The RMWB explores the use of the web and other social networking opportunities to keep the Master Plan within the public realm (and keep current), gather regular feedback and communicate to users and the public the schedule for evaluating and updating the Master Plan.

### **The Role of the Trail Advisory Group**

The trail advisory group has a significant role in the ongoing evaluation of the Master Plan, and ensuring it remains relevant to users, stakeholders and the public. At a minimum, user groups have an active role in ongoing consultation, ensuring its members are well represented at workshops and open houses. Ideally, as the group matures it can formalize strategic planning into its management processes and assume a greater leadership role in the ongoing evaluation and review of the Master Plan.

## **12.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

***In order to establish the framework for ongoing management of OHV resources and the meaningful evaluation of the Master Plan over the long term, the emphasis should be to address immediate issues and opportunities, and build upon existing strengths to lay the groundwork for long term, sustainable initiatives.***

**Establish a trail advisory group to assist with the management of OHV resources and the evaluation of the Master Plan.** This group should be initiated by the RMWB and include representation by affected user groups



(including non-motorized users as appropriate) and at a minimum key stakeholders representing the areas of trail amenities, trail use, enforcement, community, planning, communication and strategic partnerships. Special effort must be made by RMWB to include Alberta Sustainable Resource Development in this group, and as appropriate, representatives of other allied groups (e.g. equestrian users and Fish and Game Association) should be included as well. Ensure municipal staff time is available to support the work of the trail advisory group.

- **Establish a process to regularly review the Master Plan and its ongoing implementation.** The Master Plan should be reviewed internally every year. As a result of this annual review and continuing community outreach, RMWB and the trails advisory group should schedule to update the plan in 3-5 years (and every 3-5 years thereafter). This ensures the Plan and its strategic directions will be reviewed and updated 2-3 times over the next decade.
- **Ensure municipal processes, capacities and budgets facilitate the regular update of the Master Plan.** Ensure reviews and processes of affected departments (e.g. By-law) are scheduled to integrate with and inform the ongoing evaluation of the Master Plan.

***Other recommendations related to plan evaluation, that for clarity are addressed elsewhere in this Master Plan document, include:***

- **Ensure the Master Plan is accessible on the internet.** Post the Master Plan on the RMWB (or standalone OHV site) to provide information on the plan, a review schedule, as well as a feedback mechanism (e.g. electronic survey form) for ongoing public and user input (see 10.4).



## 13.0 IMPLEMENTATION

The Master Plan is intended to provide a framework for the planning, design and management of OHV opportunities and resources in the Fort McMurray area over the next 10 years. In terms of timeframes, recommendations are prioritized as follows -

- Highest priority should be given to and primary focus placed on those actions that are already initiated and with minimal effort will yield immediate results or 'quick wins' for the Master Planning process. High priority should also be given to those actions representing critical steps in long term processes (e.g. establishing budgets for future operational reviews and Master Plan evaluations. These highest priority recommendations should be completed within an immediate 0 - 9 month window.
- The next highest priority should be given to those actions that require some degree of lead time and represent key steps in longer term planning processes. The development of trail planning and design standards is an example of this type of recommendation. These actions should be completed within a 0 -18 month window.
- Longer term priorities are those actions that represent the culmination of complex processes, such as the development of OHV trail networks in the Fort McMurray area. In addition, this timeframe also provides for lower priority actions that are valuable to the overall process, are not critical to the success of the project over the short - medium timeframe (e.g. establishment of fees for trail access). Because of the longer term nature of these actions, a definable timeframe is difficult to identify; however, by the time of the first scheduled (overall) review of the master plan within a 3 - 5 year window, significant development in these areas should have been made.

Following completion of the first overall review of the Master Plan, and the incorporation of necessary strategic adjustments, implementation of the master plan can proceed with continued capital investment and the refinement of management techniques reflecting changing best practices. The completion of these actions within this 30 month window roughly corresponds to the anticipated cycle of Master Plan evaluation, when an opportunity exists to review the plan in depth and make strategic adjustments as necessary.





## APPENDIX B : BEST PRACTICE REVIEW

A best practices or state of the art review was conducted with selected municipalities, government agencies and Non-Government-Organizations with direct experience in the management of trails for Off Highway Vehicles, including snowmobiles. The review identified a range of approaches being taken to manage OHV's in Alberta and outlines the experiences, both good and bad, of other agencies.

The first step in the review was a website search for relevant information (e.g. Trail Plans, OHV By-laws). Follow-up telephone calls were made to agencies with active OHV management programs.

The following agencies were contacted -

- Municipality of Crowsnest Pass
- District of Elkford (British Columbia adjacent to Crowsnest Pass)
- North East Muni-Corr Ltd- Iron Horse Trail
- City of Cold Lake
- Town of St. Paul
- Town of Elk Point
- Municipal District of Bonnyville
- County of Strathcona
- Sturgeon County
- Red Deer County
- Town of Sylvan Lake
- Town of Athabasca
- Big Horn Backcountry- AB Sustainable Resource Development
- Ghost-Waiparous Area- AB Sustainable Resource Development



## DETAILED NOTES

### **Municipality of Crowsnest Pass**

Cam Metz- Recreation Coordinator  
403 562 8833

Crowsnest Pass has an extensive network of OHV and snowmobile trails on Crown lands surrounding the urban areas. Trails are designated for specific uses, but compliance is voluntary. Two volunteer clubs, the Quad Squad and Crow Snow Riders are actively involved in trail maintenance (grooming, monitoring, bridges, signs).

The municipality had a by-law that permitted riders to travel within the urban areas to surrounding trails, but there were many problems and abuses of the by-law. In late 2007, the by-law was changed to require people to trailer their machines to trail heads and staging area.

### **District of Elkford British Columbia**

[www.elkfordtrails.com](http://www.elkfordtrails.com)

The District of Elkford is adjacent to the Crowsnest Pass with a system of linked OHV trails. The District allows OHV users to ride from their homes to the nearest trails in Elkford with a specific District permit. Riders are required to follow regulations and obtain the necessary insurance, permits and registration. The District has an OHV by-law (All-Terrain-Vehicles By-law) that sets out regulations, including a map of Motorized Trail Routes.

### **North East Muni-Corr Ltd- Iron Horse Trail**

Marianne Price- Administrator  
1 888 645 4155  
[www.ironhorsetrail.ca](http://www.ironhorsetrail.ca)

The Iron Horse Trail is a multi-use trail (including OHV's) that was developed on an abandoned rail bed. The Trail extends from Cold Lake and Heinsburg in the east to Waskatenau (near Smoky Lake) in the west. North East Muni-Corr Ltd owns the trail and is made up of the municipalities along the route. The Riverland Recreational Trail Society, made up of stakeholders, is very active in trail operations (monitoring, maintenance, repairs, and patrols to make the public aware of trail rules).



The municipalities have adopted a uniform trail by-law for the segment of the Iron Horse Trail that crosses their jurisdiction. The uniform by-law includes requirements like requires OHV registration, insurance and speed control.

**City of Cold Lake**

Len Mainville- By-law Officer  
780 594 1345

The Iron Horse Trail starts in Cold Lake. The City has adopted the uniform by-law for the Iron Horse Trail. In addition, they have an OHV By-law that allows OHV users to travel directly from their house to surrounding trails or staging areas, with no stops enroute (e.g. at gas stations). Snowmobile use in the winter has not been a problem, but there are major problems in the summer with quads traveling in highway ditches and on roads. Enforcement is very difficult.

Constable Mainville recommended that users of OHV's be required to trailer their machines to staging area and there be no motorized trails in urban areas

**Town of St Paul**

Colin Fehr- Community Services Peace Officer  
780 645 5311

The Town has adopted a by-law that allows access to and from the Iron Horse Trail and the boundary of the municipality. The by-law also regulates hours of operation, speed limits, registration and insurance. No major abuses have occurred following initiation of a strong enforcement program.



REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY  
OF WOOD BUFFALO

## Annual Communication Plan

*Off Highway Vehicles*

Created by: Tyran Ault

Last Revised: May 19, 2009

### Background:

Off Highway Vehicles (OHVs) are very popular in Wood Buffalo. An Ad-hoc OHV Access Group was formed in 2005 that included various departments within the Municipality and outside groups. In 2007, advertisements started airing regarding OHV usage in Wood Buffalo. The following communication plan continues on the themes established in that initial campaign and expands on them. The plan breaks OHV communication into four campaigns: one for off-season, one for summer, one for winter, and one that runs amidst the other three.

### Goals and Objectives:

1) *Promote the term "urban service area" and rules for OHVs within it:*

- The Municipality will create a general awareness of what the urban service area is, what the boundaries are, and where OHVs are permitted (Off-Season Campaign)

2) *Teach the importance of OHV safety:*

- The Municipality will educate residents about safe and responsible OHV riding practices (Summer Campaign)

3) *Teach the importance of snowmobile safety:*

- The Municipality will educate residents about safe and responsible snowmobile riding practices (Winter Campaign)

4) *Promote trail stewardship:*

- The Municipality will raise awareness about environmental responsibilities of OHV riders (All-Season Campaign)

### Messages:

- *Keep your OHV out of the USA* – Residents need to be aware of the boundaries of the urban service area and also that OHVs are not allowed in them.

- *Ride Right, Ride Safe, Ride Responsible* – Residents need to be aware of the dangers of OHV/snowmobile riding and practice safe riding at all times.
- *Show respect when you ride* – Residents need to be reminded that they have an environmental responsibility when riding OHVs and snowmobiles and need to respect their surroundings.

### Target Audiences:

Primary:

- Spring and summer OHV riders and user groups.
- Fall and winter snowmobile riders and user groups.
- The general public.

Secondary:

- Media.

### Key Considerations:

- 1) *Urban Service Area* – Despite previous advertising efforts, the majority of the population probably still does not know what the term "urban service area" means.
- 2) *Other Campaigns* – In addition to the Municipality's OHV campaign, the Northern Lights Health Region had its own campaign raising awareness of deaths and injuries on OHVs in 2007. The Municipality will inquire to see if they will be running this campaign once again, and if so, what coordination between the two parties is available.

### Approach:

1) The Municipality will create a general awareness of what the urban service area is, what the boundaries are, and where OHVs are permitted (Off-Season Campaign).

- Brochures/flyers will be distributed to raise awareness of boundaries, OHV drop off areas, and will include information about OHV safety all seasons.
  - Will be distributed in July/August
  - Will be sent to all local OHV clubs, dealers, Fort McMurray Tourism, and other associated agencies
  - Will be electronically posted on Municipality's website
  - Communications will create document, which will include map of USA, safety tips for OHVs and snowmobiles
  - Colour brochure
  - Input from Bylaw and local clubs will be necessary
  - If budget allows, brochure will be sent to households across Wood Buffalo
  - Amount of copies to be determined by budget



- A news release will be issued reminding residents about USA boundaries and drop off points.
    - October/November
    - Communications will issue news release with assistance from Bylaw and local OHV clubs
    - Bylaw to be available for media interviews
  - Advertising will run in local newspaper and community newsletters
    - Ads will run in April/May and October/November
    - Communications will produce and book all ads
    - The ads will be focused on USA definition, boundaries, and drop off points
    - Ads will run in Friday and Saturday Fort McMurray Today
    - Ads will run in weekly Connect
    - Ads will be sent to rural offices for inclusion in community newsletters
  - Advertising will run on local radio stations.
    - Ads will run April/May and October/November
    - Communications will write, record, and book ads
    - The ads will be focused on USA definition, boundaries, and drop off points
    - Possible news/weather sponsor opportunities will be examined to maximize specific messaging once per day (7:00 a.m. or 5 p.m. range)
    - If sponsor opportunities do not exist, then ads will be staggered and will alternate on a day-to-day basis on four main local radio stations
  - Local media interviews and talk show appearances will promote the definition of the urban service area, its boundaries, and drop off points.
    - March/April and October/November
    - Representatives from Bylaw will appear on local radio morning shows and talk shows to promote the USA
  - The Municipal webpage will be updated with new urban service area information.
    - At time of campaign re-launch
    - Webpage will have information regarding all campaigns in this communication plan, but will be updated throughout the year to reflect which campaign is currently being promoted
    - The promoted campaign will be highlighted on main page and then moved to high priority on a OHV sub-website
- 2) The Municipality will educate residents about safe and responsible OHV riding practices (Summer Campaign)
- A news release will be issued reminding residents about OHV/quad season and safety practices.
    - Mid-to-late June

- Communications will issue news release with assistance from Bylaw and local OHV clubs
  - Bylaw to be available for media interviews
- Advertising will run in local newspaper and community newsletters
    - Ads will run in April/May and October/November
    - Communications will produce and book all ads
    - The ads will be focused on Ride Right, Ride Safe, Ride Responsible messaging
    - Ads will run in Friday and Saturday Fort McMurray Today
    - Ads will run in weekly Connect
    - Ads will be sent to rural offices for inclusion in community newsletters
  - Advertising will run on local radio stations.
    - Ads will run from mid-to-late June to September
    - Communications will write, record, and book ads
    - The ads will be focused on Ride Right, Ride Safe, Ride Responsibly messaging
    - At least three different ads will be produced to rotate through and keep campaign fresh
    - Possible news/weather sponsor opportunities will be examined to maximize specific messaging once per day (7:00 a.m. or 5 p.m. range)
    - If sponsor opportunities do not exist, then ads will be staggered and will alternate on a day-to-day basis on four main local radio stations
- 3) The Municipality will educate residents about safe and responsible snowmobile riding practices (Winter Campaign)
- A news release will be issued reminding residents about snowmobile season and safety practices.
    - Early December
    - Communications will issue news release with assistance from Bylaw and local OHV clubs
    - Bylaw to be available for media interviews
  - Advertising will run in local newspaper and community newsletters
    - Ads will run from December to February
    - Communications will produce and book all ads
    - The ads will be focused on Ride Right, Ride Safe, Ride Responsible messaging
    - Ads will run in Friday and Saturday Fort McMurray Today
    - Ads will run in weekly Connect
    - Ads will be sent to rural offices for inclusion in community newsletters
  - Advertising will run on local radio stations.
    - Ads will run from December to February



- Communications will write, record, and book ads
- The ads will be focused on Ride Right, Ride Safe, Ride Responsible messaging
- At least 3 different ads will be produced to rotate through and keep campaign fresh
- Possible news/weather sponsor opportunities will be examined to maximize specific messaging once per day (7:00 a.m. or 5 p.m. range)
- If sponsor opportunities do not exist, then ads will be staggered and will alternate on a day-to-day basis on four main local radio stations

4) The Municipality will raise awareness about environmental responsibilities of OHV riders (All-Season Campaign)

- A news release will be issued reminding residents about trail stewardship, respect for nature, environmental responsibilities of OHV riders, and the consequences of harming the environment.
  - January and July
  - Communications will issue news release with assistance from Parks, Bylaw and local OHV clubs
  - Parks or Bylaw to be available for media interviews
- Advertising will run in local newspaper and community newsletters
  - Ads will be mixed with other advertising campaigns outlined in this plan
  - Communications will produce and book all ads
  - The ads will be focused on trail stewardship, respect for nature, environmental responsibilities, and the consequences of harming the environment of OHV riders
  - Ads will take the place of other OHV ads once per month in Fort McMurray Today and Connect
  - Ads will be sent to rural offices for inclusion in community newsletters
- Advertising will run on local radio stations.
  - Ads will be mixed with other advertising campaigns outlined in this plan
  - Communications will write, record, and book all ads
  - The ads will be focused on trail stewardship, respect for nature, environmental responsibilities of OHV riders, and the consequences of harming the environment
  - Ads will take the place of other OHV ads once per month on four main local radio stations

**Required Discussions:**

- Communications needs to meet with Bylaw and Ad-Hoc OHV Access Group to discuss Communication Plan and confirm messaging
- An advertising budget needs to be determined by necessary parties
- Communications and Chris Naudi will create an advertising cost breakdown

- Communications needs to contact Purchasing to determine cost of brochure mailouts
- Communications to inquire with Alberta Health Services (Northern Lights Health Region) to see if they will be running OHV-related advertisements

**Budget:**

- To be determined

**Evaluation:**

- RCMP and Bylaw statistical information will show if OHV incidents have increased or decreased annually
- A survey may be conducted amongst local OHV groups to determine if annual campaign was effective among membership