



BC Conservation Officer Service 2011 Access Guardian Program Report

*compiled by Conservation Officer Jeff Piwek
August 3rd to November 1st 2011*

Introduction

The Elk Valley Access Guardian Program was first established in 2009, at which time it employed a seasonal Conservation Officer to patrol and enforce the access mandate for a six month period, May to October. The seasonal officer focused on education, public relations, compliance and enforcement relating to access management issues in Regional District of East Kootenay (RDEK) - Area "A".

In 2010 there was no dedicated access guardian position in the Elk Valley. Instead, general duty Conservation Officers from the Fernie Conservation Officer Service (COS) took responsibility for the access mandate. Unfortunately operational need often required that officers spend their time on matters of more immediate public concern, such as conflict wildlife issues. The lack of available staff made it impossible for general duty members to focus their attention on the access program; this resulted in less than desired officer presence in Access Management Areas and limited public outreach and education efforts.

In 2010/2011 the need for a full time and active access guardian position, within the RDEK - Area "A", was recognized. The Regional District of East Kootenay worked in partnership with the Conservation Officer Service the Village of Elkford, the District of Sparwood, the City of Fernie and the Columbia Basin Trust to provide funding to establish a new Conservation officer position in the Fernie Office. It was agreed that for six months of the year the new officers' sole objective would be to patrol the access management areas and educate the public regarding local Access Management Areas (AMAs) and enforce the relevant legislation/regulations. It was agreed that during the non-access period of the year, the officer would assume the role of a general duty Conservation Officer. Having the program established full time, rather than seasonally, ensures continuous service of a single officer. This will reduce resource expense for annual training, it will improve relationship building and local interest to the program by integrating the officer into the community, and it will increase Conservation Officer presence in the Elk Valley.

Since the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Province and its local partners regarding the Access Guardian Program was not initialized until the latter part of this summer, the 2011 access guardian term was set for three months (August to October). Future Guardian positions will likely be run for six months of the year.

Maps

To reduce document size, AMA maps have not been included in this report. If required maps of individual AMAs are available from two sources, the Ministry of environment website (www.env.gov.bc.ca/kootenay/eco/accessmaps.htm) and the Hunting Regulations Synopsis. The hunting synopsis is available in print and online (www.env.gov.bc.ca/fw/wildlife/hunting/regulations/). The maps available from the MoE website are in colour and contain much greater detail. However, the information shown in the hunting synopsis should be considered as the correct version for any discrepancy between source maps.

2011 Access Guardian Program Results

Table 1 Overall Results of the 2011 Access program. Total number of patrols and time spent within each AMA was recorded along with the number of persons contacted along with the number of charges, warnings and education delivered.

AMA	*Officer Presence			Officer Action			
	Patrols Conducted	Hours on Site	Contacts Made	**Persons Educated	Access Warnings	Access Charges	Other Violations
Alexander Creek MU 4-23	6	43	67	13	3	1	0
Barnes Lake MU 4-23	2	10	8	1	0	0	2
Chauncey Todhunter MU 4-23	4	12	24	1	0	0	2
Corbin MU 4-23	2	6	6	1	0	0	0
East Flathead MU 4-01	6	42.3	75	7	3	0	1
Galton Range MU 4-02	2	9	2	0	0	0	0
Grave Prairie MU 4-23	15	53.5	100	21	3	3	2
Upper Elk Valley MU 4-23	5	15	67	9	0	1	1
Upper Flathead MU 4-01	4	22.75	10	0	0	0	0
Upper Wigwam MU 4-02	5	16	14	2	0	1	0
Weigert Creek MU 4-23	4	4.5	1	0	0	0	0
Wigwam Flats MU 4-02	6	13	48	5	2	0	0
Other (outreach and education)	4	11.01	19	1	0	0	0
Total:	65	258.06	441	61	11	6	8

* Officer Presence is calculated as the time officer(s) were physically present in an AMA, it does not account for travel.

** Persons Educated is defined as COS discussing specific AMA facts and requirements of which the person in question was previously unaware. It should be noted that the Access Guardian Program and general AMA facts are discussed with $\geq 80\%$ of contacts

From August 3rd to November 1st, 2011 the COS conducted 61 field patrols of the AMAs within the boundaries overseen by the Access Guardian position. During these patrols the Access Guardian, in combination with General Duty Conservation Officers, spent 258.06 hours working on frontline AMA activities (Table 1). In British Columbia a Conservation Officer is required to work 140 hours per month which means that during the agreed upon 3 month work term, August to October, the 2011 access program had 420 hours of available work time. Approximately 247 hours were spent having officers physically present in an AMA, which translates into 59% of the total available time. Hours were only recorded to show time spent in an AMA and did not account for travel time to and from location or for administrative tasks associated with patrol activities. An estimated 62.13 hours were spent in transit from Fernie to various AMAs (Table 2). Adding these hours to patrol time (including outreach), the COS spent roughly 320.19 hours or 76% of the total available time away from the office and dedicated to the AMA mandate.

Readers should be advised that three complaints were received and followed up on, which required no time being spent in the associated AMA. One complaint was for Grave Prairie, one for Alexander Creek and the other for the Upper Elk Valley. These were entered into the statistical tracking tool under their respective locations (no time in location was entered); this means they would have been counted as a patrol to that area and used in the Table 2 calculations. No adjustment was made to account for this as follow-up for the complaint required time out of the office similar to the associated travel time. So there

should be no error in the estimated time spent away from the office and focused on the access mandate.

Table 2 Estimated times spent travelling to various AMAs. Travel time calculated by multiplying Travel Distance by the number of Patrols conducted. (ex: Alexander Creek: Travel distance (1) x Patrols (6) = 6 hrs of travel time).

AMA	Travel Distance	Patrols	Travel time (hrs)
Alexander Creek	1 hr	6	6
Barnes Lake	1.5 hrs	2	3
Chauncey Todhunter	1.3 hrs	4	5.2
Corbin	0.67 hrs	2	1.34
East Flathead	2 hrs	6	12
Galton Range	1 hr	2	2
Grave Prairie	0.75 hrs	15	11.25
Upper Elk Valley	1.3	5	6.5
Upper Flathead	1 hr	4	4
Upper Wigwam	1 hr	5	5
Weigert Creek	0.83 hrs	4	3.32
Wigwam Flats	0.42 hrs	6	2.52
Total:			62.13

Each AMA was patrolled on at least two occasions (Table 2) and there were motorized users, or signs of their presence, at each location. Access charges or warnings were issued in Alexander Creek, East Flathead, Grave Prairie, and Wigwam Flats (Table 2). Areas where no access charges or warnings were issued should not be interpreted as having a 100% compliance rate. Each AMA was observed to have some sign of motorized use in non-motorized areas; however the vehicles in question were not intercepted or reported to the COS. There were certainly some AMAs which received higher use, and others which seemed to have higher levels of non-compliance regarding non-motorized areas.

Discussion regarding individual AMAs to follow alphabetically:

Alexander Creek

The Atlas staging area on the Alberta side of the mountain range is a very popular destination for Alberta riders; as a result the Alexander AMA appears to receive heavy recreational pressure, originating most commonly from Alberta. The area most accessed is Deadman’s Pass. The main road through Deadman’s Pass is open year-round; however several braiding trails have developed as a result of non-compliance. The biggest issue resulting from the trail braiding is the consistent use of the “Creek Trail”. This trail follows alongside and through the creek and emerges at the base of the Deadman’s Pass on the BC side. Being in a riparian area the trail is often wet and muddy which makes the soil highly susceptible to damage caused by motorized vehicles, such as rutting, compaction and erosion. In talking with resource users, it was determined that the “Creek Trail” is attractive to riders because it is not as steep as the open portion of road and is less intimidating to inexperience or less-adventurous riders. Another

issue encountered regarding the Deadman’s Pass trail is the trail map produced by the Crows Nest Quad Squad ATV club. Their map contradicts the BC hunting synopsis, showing the “Creek Road” as open and the road as closed. The Quad Squad was contacted and is aware of the issue. They are in the initial process of developing new maps and are open to input from the BC COS. Contact should be directed to the club’s president, contact information available on the club website (www.quadsquad.ca). Closure signs were not often found missing in this area; however signs posted at the BC/AB border at Deadman’s Pass were consistently ripped down. Based on observed tire tracks, it is also unlikely that signs are an adequate deterrent for the use of closed trails. Use of the “Creek Trail” only stopped when a large tree fell and made the trail impassable.

Results:

Table 3 Alexander AMA statistics

Patrols	6
Hours on site	43
# of contacts	67
# educated	13
Access Charges	1
Access Warnings	3
Other Violations	0

Two of the warnings and the one charge in the Alexander AMA were issued on Deadman’s Pass along the “Creek Trail”. The third warning was issued to a hunter who was reported, through RAPP, to have driven up a non-motorized road on the west side of the valley.

Recommendations:

Deadman’s Pass often receives an extremely high number of recreational users. Word of mouth is likely to be the most effective way to promote compliance. Increased officer presence, roving patrols or on-site surveillance within closed areas, will increase the opportunity to educate users regarding the AMA. In the absence of officer presence, closed areas must be permanently deactivated and made inaccessible to vehicle access; dropping large trees across trails will accomplish the desired result. At the base of the BC side of Deadman’s pass, the “Creek Trail” could be ditched or have large boulders placed to barricade access (this could be accomplished in cooperation with Tembec). Due to the high volume of use, any ride-able trail (open or closed to use) will likely be used by enthusiastic resource users.

The Racehorse Pass trail is also a popular through route from Alberta to BC and is often used in conjunction with the Deadman’s pass to complete a circle route. Racehorse is also a popular sheep hunting location. It should be patrolled occasionally to assess the level of compliance for the area. Contact should be made with Alberta trail and ATV groups to ensure that users are aware of the closures in BC. Alberta newspapers may also be a useful tool in spreading education.

Barnes Lake

Barnes Lake is a small AMA, accessible by ATV. It appeared to be an area most commonly used for recreational riding and hiking. Closure signs at this location seemed to have little effect, as the tracks found in the mud indicated heavy motorized vehicle use. Half way to Barnes Lake, the road has been deeply cross-ditched, vehicle users have bypassed the ditch by driving through the adjacent meadow. As

a result the soft earth has been deeply rutted and torn up. Barnes Lake, with its quality view-scape and remote backcountry atmosphere, is a heavy draw for recreationalists. Users will travel from out of province to camp on site. Those at risk of non-compliance are likely day-users who are keen to see the lake, but believe they have limited time to accomplish this.

Results:

Table 4 Barnes Lake AMA statistics

Patrols	2
Hours on site	10
# of contacts	8
# educated	1
Access Charges	0
Access Warnings	0
Other Violations	2

Both violations within the Barnes Lake AMA were issued to non-residents, found fishing without possessing BC angling licences.

Recommendations:

To increase the percentage of riders who obey the closure, it would be advisable to educate users by posting a sign detailing the damage inflicted by riding through marsh-type land. It would also be beneficial to post a sign with the walking distance to the lake from the end of the open portion of road (<1.5 km) along with an estimated walking time (0.5 hours at a slow pace). This would potentially increase compliance, as it would show how little time it takes to access the lake on foot. Because this area is attractive to hikers and mountain bikers, it would be useful to post RAPP signs and promote non-motorized users to report violators.

Because there is only one access road into the Barnes Lake AMA, an officer patrolling this area will be able to encounter all of the users. To increase the number of resource users educated in this area, it would best to patrol during peak recreational times (i.e.: summer, warm sunny-weekends, and long-weekends).

Chauncey Todhunter

The Chauncey Todhunter AMA is easily accessed from the paved roadway to the Fording mine. The area is appealing to hunters and general recreationalists. Because many of the roadways within the AMA are visible from the highway, non-compliance is less rampant and there is a higher level of self-policing relative to more remotes AMAs. Field observations would suggest that many of the non-motorized roads are being abused; however there are active logging and mining operations underway within the AMA and it is difficult to determine if the traffic is industrial or resource users in non-compliance.

The road from Dry Creek to Grace Creek is no longer accessible as a complete loop. Users will be blocked from either end by the developing mine activities. The ends of the line are well signed and deactivated. The Grace Creek road (often referred to as the CNI road) is an area of concern especially during the hunting season. The issue being, due to the mountainous terrain hunters are using vehicles to retrieve wildlife. Another issue is that it is difficult to decipher the map shown in the BC hunting regulations

(Figure 1). In reality the road open year round, ends at a fork. The spur to the right is the dashed line shown on the synopsis map (open June 16 to August 31). The spur to the left is a logging road, which is not shown in the synopsis, and provides more immediate access to the higher elevations of the valley. The closed road, to the left, is newer, more heavily travelled and is also in better condition than the open road. The site was signed correctly; however if the signs go missing users will, in good faith, likely end up driving along the newer, closed, road. The open road is beginning to become overgrown and in some sections it is a hard to determine ATV trail. It follows alongside Grave Creek and in some places the trail requires riders drive within the stream channel. At their ends, both the left and right fork roads intersect to a single road which then leads to the dead end set in place by the mining activity.

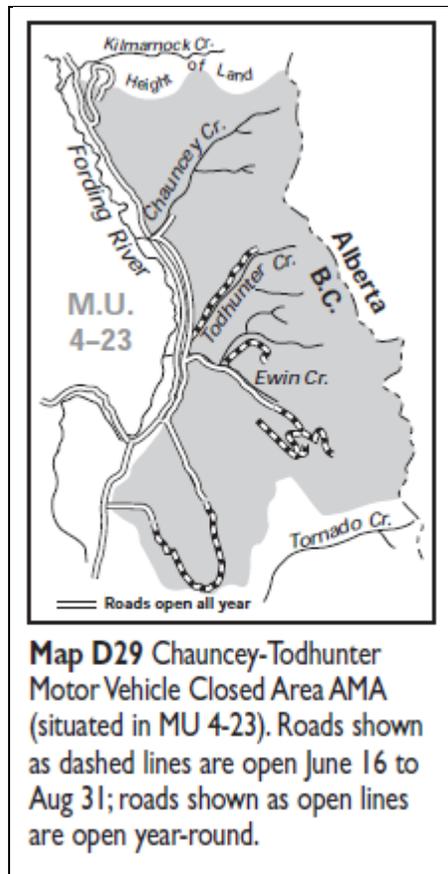


Figure 1 Chauncey Todhunter AMA map from BC Hunting & Trapping Regulations Synopsis page 53

Results:

Patrols	4
Hours on site	12
# of contacts	24
# educated	1
Access Charges	0
Access Warnings	0
Other Violations	2

Both violations encountered were hunters who did not have their hunting licences with them.

Recommendations:

It would be beneficial to approach the industry personnel (Mine/Forestry companies and contractors) and to educate them regarding the AMA. This would make it possible to ensure that all industry users are operating within their permits. It would also provide a direct contact for industry workers who may report any issues of non-compliance or potential concern. Developing industry contact may also provide an opportunity to devise innovative ways to deactivate non-motorized areas.

The seasonal opening of the right fork road in Grace Creek should be re-examined. The road is currently better classified as a rough trail and follows the valley bottom, often within the riparian area. This trail also has several eroded and rutted hill-climbs. The roadway currently open should be evaluated to determine whether environmental impact will be severe enough to disallow motorized access. The left fork should also be reconsidered. If there will be no impact to wildlife it would cause little harm to allow seasonal motorized access, June 16 to August 31. It should be noted that this road traverses a steep slope and is narrow in some locations, the potential for debris slides and slope failure exist and should be considered before opening the area for public use. If it is determined that there are no risks involved with users being granted access to the left fork and there are no serious concerns regarding the right fork, the two roads would make an enjoyable loop ride and should be considered for seasonal opening, June 16 to August 31.

The roads within the Todhunter AMA lead into watersheds separated by high ridges and ending in steep draws, an officer will be most successful in encountering resources users by active patrolling. Most of the roads are one way in and one way out, an officer will have a high probability of encountering all users on any given road. The area is appropriately signed, the most successful way to maintain and/or improve compliance is to increase officer presence and promote education regarding the access regulations.

CORBIN

The Corbin AMA is less popular for use than many of the other AMAs. However it offers hunting opportunities within a short commute from Sparwood. The Corbin AMA road and trail network also connect to Alberta and offers the potential for non-residents to unknowingly enter a non-motorized area.

Results:

Table 6 Corbin AMA statistics

Patrols	2
Hours on site	6
# of contacts	6
# educated	1
Access Charges	0
Access Warnings	0
Other Violations	0

While no charges or warnings were issued at this location, there was visible evidence of motorized vehicles bypassing locked gates and travelling into non-motorized areas during the three month access term.

Recommendations:

The Corbin area does not require a high level of attention as it is less frequented, by users, than many other AMAs. It should be considered primarily during hunting season. An ATV patrol is an effective way to patrol this location and will be more convenient to make a thorough patrol. If serious issues begin to persist, the local mines and/or railroad may make a useful partnership in developing effective road/trail deactivation solutions. Corbin should also be considered for patrol during long weekends and nice summer days when there is a greater probability that recreational riders may be out on the trails.

East Flathead

The East Flathead AMA covers a large tract of land and is one of the most remote AMAs. It is a very popular hunting destination, mostly during elk and Moose seasons, it is also a desirable riding destination for riders staging out of Alberta. Users will generally set up camp and remain in the area overnight or for a few weeks. The majority of users also use ATVs/UTVs or motorbikes as a primary mode of transportation while hunting. Anecdotally, the level of non-compliance regarding access restriction in the East Flathead has declined in recent years. However, due to the volume of big game hunters and ease of access for off-road vehicles there are still many violations occurring.

Results:

Table 7 East Flathead AMA statistics

Patrols	6
Hours on site	42.3
# of contacts	75
# educated	7
Access Charges	0
Access Warnings	3
Other Violations	1

Two warnings were issued to a pair of riders who were found on Middlepass. The third warning was issued on the South Sage road, and the other violation was for open liquor in a motor vehicle.

Recommendations:

The East Flathead should be considered a primary location for running projects involving general duty Conservation Officers. The MoE Cabin is an excellent staging ground and provides all the resources necessary to run a multi-day project. Generally there is also a high level of interest from East Kootenay COs to participate in projects for this area. Multiple officers will also be beneficial in covering a larger portion of the AMA at any given time. Because most users camp in this AMA, irregular bank hour patrols may produce better results in the number of contacts and education provided regarding the access mandate. There are several guide outfitters and trappers who operate in this area and all have excellent working relationships with the COS. Efforts should be made to maintain contact with these operators as they may be able to provide useful information and recommendations as well as assistance in properly managing the area to promote compliance with access regulations.

The Middlepass trail is a through route from BC to Alberta; it receives a high level of motorized traffic and should be considered a priority for patrols. Contact should be made with Alberta trail clubs and ATV

groups to ensure that users are aware of the closures in BC. Alberta newspapers may also be a useful tool in spreading education.

Galton Range

There are few roads in the Galton AMA and the primary draw to the area is during the later portion of the hunting season. The road network in this AMA is limited, but heavily fragmented; each road enters a different drainage. To patrol each area an officer has to move in and out of the AMA and travel on highway 93, this can make it difficult to make contact with all users in the area. Phillips creek is one of the most commonly used roads in this area, as it provides access to Rabbit Creek. Rabbit Creek is the south-western corner of the Upper Wigwam AMA and it contains better road access to quality hunting habitat.

Results:

Table 8 Galton AMA statistics

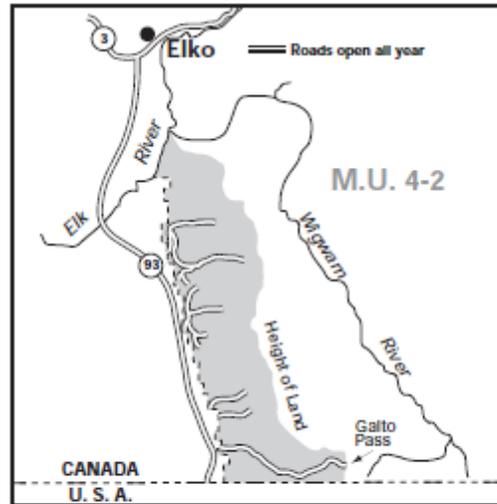
Patrols	2
Hours on site	9
# of contacts	2
# educated	0
Access Charges	0
Access Warnings	0
Other Violations	0

No charges or warnings were issued in the Galton AMA; however there were signs that vehicles had been driving into some non-motorized areas in Red Canyon and Maguire Creek. Due to time constraints during the patrols the Wille-phillips creek, Miller Creek, and Rainbow Creek road network were not patrolled.

Recommendations:

Phillips Creek and the accessible portion of the Upper Wigwam AMA are most likely areas for an access non-compliance to occur. The non-motorized portion of the Upper Wigwam is blocked by a gate; however the lock and chain are on occasion broken open. When the gate is left open there is a high level of non-compliance, so occasional patrols to this area should be conducted to ensure the gate is secured.

Most of the roads in the Galton AMA have portions which are open to motorized use year-round. The map shown in the BC Hunting Regulations, (Figure 2) is difficult to use to interpret where the closures end. To reduce accidental violation of access regulations it would be beneficial to post closure signs at the end of the open portion of each road.

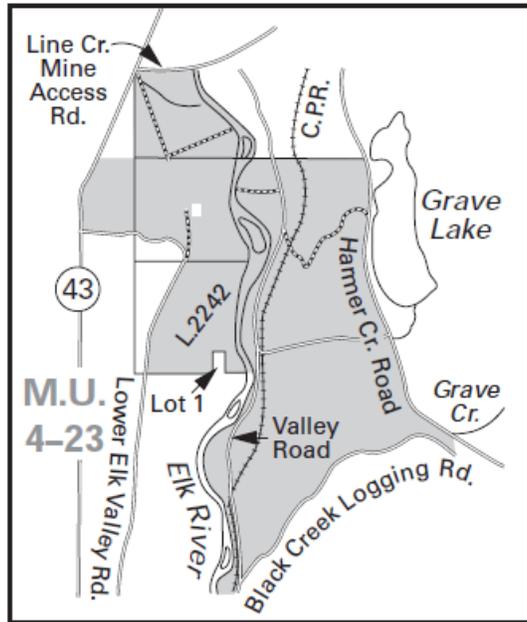


Map D6 Galton Range Motor Vehicle Closed Area (situated in MU 4-2), except roads shown as open lines are open year round.

Figure 2 Galton Range AMA map from BC Hunting & Trapping Regulations Synopsis page 51

Grave Prairie

Grave Prairie is one of the most heavily used AMAs; it is popular for hunting and camping and is sometimes a destination for recreational ATV/UTV/motorbike riding. Grave Prairie is frequented by locals from Sparwood, Elkford and Fernie. It is also a popular destination for non-locals, many people coming from as far as Vancouver Island and the lower mainland. Despite the high volume of non-local users, ignorance of the regulations should not be considered an issue in this area. Prior to entering the AMA, via Line Creek Road, users pass a large, detailed, map which clearly indicates where motorized vehicles are allowed. The same map is posted on the Grave Prairie Mainline near Black Creek FSR. The available map in the BC hunting regulations (Figure 3) is also sufficiently detailed to have no misunderstanding of the regulations. The only additional comment, regarding the synopsis map, which may be of use is that the Black Creek Logging Road "Branch A" makes up most of the boundary for the southern portion of the AMA. Past "Branch A" the Black Creek road is not with the AMA.



Map D34 Grave Prairie Motor Vehicle Closed Area (situated in MU 4-23). Roads shown as open lines are open year-round; roads shown as dashed lines are open May 15 to Sept 30.

Figure 3 Grave Prairie AMA map from BC Hunting & Trapping Regulations Synopsis page 54

Results:

Table 9 Grave Prairie AMA statistics

Patrols	15
Hours on site	53.5
# of contacts	100
# educated	21
Access Charges	3
Access Warnings	3
Other Violations	2

A charge and a warning were issued to vehicles parked in a non-motorized area near the “swinging bridge camp” (accessed by the northern-most seasonal road on the east side of the river). A charge was also issued to a vehicle parked in the non-motorized area near 76 km. There was a warning issued for open liquor in a motor vehicle. A warning and charge were issued to a pair of hunters found in the non-motorized area on the west side of the river. One of the hunters was also issued a charge for improperly cancelling a species tag. The COS also followed up on two public complaints of vehicles parked in non-motorized areas, they were unable to confirm one and another resulted in a warning.

Recommendations:

Grave Prairie is a popular destination and should be considered a priority area throughout the active guardian year. It receives a high volume of users and due to its concentration of big game species; it is often the location for many Wildlife Act offences.

It would be beneficial to approach mine personnel and to educate them regarding the AMA. This would make it possible to provide a direct contact for industry workers who may report issues of non-compliance or potential concern. Developing industry contact may also provide an opportunity to devise innovative ways to deactivate non-motorized areas.

The “swinging bridge camp” can comfortably contain several camps. It is also surrounded by large open grassland which appears to receive heavy motorized use. This is valuable habitat and should be considered a priority in reducing motorized use. The same issue persists in the grasslands near the 76 km marker on the main Grave Prairie road. There is also a spur road, leading to the river, at 76 km which is the only location within the Grave Prairie AMA where a closure sign is consistently being removed by users. On several occasions, natural barriers have been set up at this location; however users have removed the barriers each time. This roadway accesses a camping spot which was set up on a bench near the river, it is likely that users are choosing to remove signs and disobey the closure at this location as it offers an excellent vantage for hunters to survey for game over a large area. The location also provides access to quality fishing areas. A potential solution to reduce vehicle access to non-motorized areas off the main Grave Prairie roadway would be to ditch the West side of the road, piling the removed dirt to create a berm. Teck Coal actively hauls on this road and may be a valuable partner in accomplishing this.

Upper Elk Valley

The Upper Elk Valley AMA receives a high volume of traffic. The road following the west side of the Elk River is heavily travelled to access the entire upper Elk Valley. The abundant wildlife and scenic values attract hunters, hikers, and 4x4 enthusiasts. There is a limited road network within the boundaries of the AMA; however there are access issues. Some of the access violations are likely hunters using vehicles to search for and retrieve big game, but there is also concern that recreational riders are entering non-motorized areas.

Results:

Table 10 Upper Elk Valley AMA statistics

Patrols	5
Hours on site	15
# of contacts	67
# educated	9
Access Charges	1
Access Warnings	0
Other Violations	1

Multiple complaints were received regarding vehicles in non-motorized areas. Follow-up, regarding the report of a vehicle in Bingay Creek, resulted in a charge being issued. Investigation of remaining complaints was concluded due to lack of suspects or information. There was also a warning issued to a hunter who had forgotten his licence at camp. In another instance a trailer was found parked within a

non-motorized area along the Connor Lake access road. The campers were educated regarding the AMA and moved their camp.

Recommendations:

The newer forest road in Bingay Creek appears to have been heavily used by motorized vehicles. A closure sign was posted but does not seem to have dissuaded users. If possible this road should be deactivated or gated to prevent vehicle access.

The Upper Elk Valley receives a high volume of recreational 4x4 use, efforts should be made to maintain contact with the Elkford ATV club. Working with this stakeholder will allow for greater distribution of education regarding the Upper Elk Valley AMA. It will also provide the club a direct contact to the ministry to express their concerns.

Because so many people access this AMA, officer presence is critical to promoting education of regulations. Officers should be sure to educate all person(s) with whom they interact regarding RAPP. It is likely that developing contacts this way, will increase the amount of information reported to the COS and allow for more effective patrols.

Upper Flathead

The primary use of the Upper Flathead AMA appears to be hunting; however the available loop trails, Barnes Cut-off, Mcevoy, and the Shoefly appeal to recreational riders. This area is more complicated for patrols as it is accessible from many directions. The Maclatchie FSR is the eastern boundary of the Upper Flathead AMA; this road intersects with the north end of the Flathead FSR, which originates from near Corbin mine. The Corbin staging ground provides access to the Barnes Lake AMA, as well as the Northwest portion of the Upper Flathead AMA near Jack Cutt's cabin. The Northwest portion is also accessible from the Morrissey Creek FSR. The Southwest corner of the Upper Flathead can be reached using the Shoefly FSR, which travels through the Wigwam flats AMA. It is apparent that vehicles are travelling within the non-motorized areas of the Upper Flathead AMA. It is possible that some of the traffic is forestry workers conducting lawful activities; however the COS has received report of hunters using ATVs within the non-motorized areas.

Results:

Table 11 Upper Flathead AMA statistics

Patrols	4
Hours on site	22.75
# of contacts	10
# educated	0
Access Charges	0
Access Warnings	0
Other Violations	0

No violations were encountered within the AMA, but there are indications that vehicles are operating in non-motorized areas. The COS has been investigating a report of hunters using ATV within non-motorized areas; however the investigation had resulted in no action at the time of writing.

Recommendations:

Recent logging activity has resulted in the construction of a more extensive road network, spurring from the Maclatchie FSR, and these areas may become heavily abused in the future. Maintaining signage and a regular presence during the hunting season will be the most effective way to promote education and compliance. Because of the complicated road network, it is difficult to patrol this area and make contact with all users. During the hunting season it may be advantageous to have a general duty COS member patrol during the same time, but separately from the guardian. This would allow for more comprehensive coverage of the area, and would be in line with the general duty mandate. It would also be beneficial to post an AMA map at the North end of the Maclatchie road to ensure users are aware of the closures when coming from the Corbin staging ground.

There are several roads which branch from the Morrissey Creek road within the AMA, all of these roads access what appeared to be quality wildlife habitat and showed signs of motorized vehicle use. Patrol of this area along with the South portion of the Maclatchie, where new roads have been constructed, should be considered a priority for patrol during the hunting season. Travel from Barnes Ranch to Cutt’s cabin along Mcevoy Creek, which connects the Morrissey and Maclatchie areas, is not recommended. Most of this trail has been washed away and requires vehicles to ride along the river channel itself. During high-flow it will not be possible to complete the journey.

Upper Wigwam

The Upper Wigwam is popular among fishermen and hunters, and is accessed throughout the spring, summer and fall. The road on the East side of the Wigwam River is open year round and has very few side roads for users to drive into non-motorized areas. The generally steep terrain also makes it difficult for vehicles to create their own trails to the river. A major concern in this area is the level of traffic which appears to be by-passing the gates installed at the North and South end of the Wigwam and at Rabbit creek. Rabbit Creek is on the West side of the river at the south end of the AMA and is accessed via Phillips Creek road through the Galton Range AMA. There is a gate at this location, but its chain and lock were broken and the gate left open. By-passing this gate grants access to a network of roads in the lower elevations of the Wigwam. On two occasions the locks at the North Gate were somehow changed without ministry consent, there was also an occasion where the chain was broken, likely with the use of an axe. At this location there is a trail where ATVs are able to drop down a slope to access the non-motorized area beyond the gate. At the South Wigwam gate a road/trail has been constructed which circumvents the gate. The Rabbit Creek gate lock was shot and the chain broken, by user attempting to gain access to the area.

Results:

Table 12 Upper Wigwam AMA statistics

Patrols	5
Hours on site	16
# of contacts	14
# educated	2
Access Charges	1
Access Warnings	0
Other Violations	0

A charge was issued to a pair of hunters found within the non-motorized area near Rabbit Creek.

Recommendations:

To prevent users from circumventing the Northern gate, it should be repositioned so that it is immediately in front of the bridge, crossing the Wigwam River. At this location it would be impossible to access the non-motorized area without opening the gate. There appears to be a significant amount of vehicle traffic bypassing the southern gate as well. Digging a ditch and creating a berm which parallels the road is a possible solution however it would need to be of considerable length to have any effect. Because the area surrounding the gate is relatively open and flat, users have been able to construct trails which go around the current ditch (dug perpendicular to the road). A more effective solution to prevent access to the road on the west side of the Wigwam River would be to install a gate immediately in front of the bridge which crosses the south end of the river. The forest service road on the east side of the river, and within the non-motorized area, should then be deactivated with deep cross-ditches to limit motorized vehicle access. If solid gates are not available it may be effective to stretch chain between two posts.

Weigert Creek

Weigert Creek is used for recreational riding and for access by hunters. The lower half of the AMA can be accessed by truck; however the road becomes overgrown and requires an ATV to patrol the upper portions. It was noted that trails are in place, which allow UTV/ATV and motorbikes to ride from the town of Elkford directly to Weigert. As a result there were no instances where vehicles and trailers were parked at the base of the AMA, making it difficult to determine the level of use.

Results:

Table 13 Weigert AMA statistics

Patrols	4
Hours on site	4.5
# of contacts	1
# educated	0
Access Charges	0
Access Warnings	0
Other Violations	0

Very few contacts were made at this location; however other users have reported to the COS that vehicle use of non-motorized areas was rampant at this location.

Recommendations:

Roving patrols of this area are likely to be the most effective way to promote education regarding the AMA. Patrols should be planned, bearing in mind that: the AMA is within close proximity to Sparwood and Elkford which makes it popular for early morning and/or evening only hunts, and that the area seems to be more commonly accessed during hunting season than any other time.

Wigwam Flats

The sections of the Wigwam River and Lodgepole Creek within the Wigwam Flats AMA are both excellent fisheries and appear to attract anglers at an international scale. The AMA also receives heavy

hunter traffic. Much of the traffic is hunters driving through to hunt locations further along the road or to park and access the Mt. Broadwood area. There are also several locations within the AMA where hunting camps are erected during the early part of the elk season. Few Access issues were noted during this season.

Results:

Table 14 Wigwam Flats AMA statistics

Patrols	6
Hours on site	13
# of contacts	48
# educated	5
Access Charges	0
Access Warnings	2
Other Violations	0

Warnings were issued to a pair of hunters found parked on Frankes Creek Road glassing across the valley for sheep.

Recommendations:

This AMA is an excellent location to conduct stationary compliance checks, as it is the exit/entry point for users coming from or going to many different locations. This approach will drastically increase the dissemination of information regarding the Access Guardian mandate.

No concerns were identified within the gated portion of the AMA during closed times; however during the open period, June 15 to July 15, the area should be a patrol priority.

The Shoefly Road is a popular location and there are many branching roads which are close to motorized vehicles. This area was not patrolled often this season, but should be in the future as it was noted that there were vehicle tracks on many of the closed roads.

Frankes Creek road provides an excellent location for hunters to spot for game and is often abused by motor vehicles. It is a short spur road and should be patrolled regularly, starting before the start of the hunting season. Ultimately it would be more effective to deactivate, block, or gate this road to prevent vehicle access.

Outreach

Outreach is a promising avenue for spreading education regarding the Access Guardian mandate. During this year the Access Guardian participated in a group ride with the Elkford ATV Club, attended an Elkford City council meeting and provided information in response to requests for information from members of the public. Because the 2011 Access Guardian was filling a three month position, there was limited effort put into outreach. It was believed that for this short period, the guardian's time was better spent in the field.

Attending general meetings for various clubs associated with outdoor activities would be an excellent way to educate a variety of users regarding the access mandate. Using these meetings as an opportunity to promote RAPP may also improve the amount of information reported by members of the public.

General Recommendations

Because there may be less time focused on access issues during peak snowmobile times, it would be beneficial to discuss snowmobiles when educating resource users at other times. The use of snowmobiles to hunt, to transport wildlife, to transport hunters to or from the location of wildlife is prohibited in the entire Kootenay Region during the period Apr 1st to Nov 30th. Snowmobiles are allowed in any AMA on roads which are open year round, so long as they remain on the open roadway. Snowmobiles are welcome without restriction in the following AMAs: Alexander Creek, Barnes Lake, Upper Elk Valley, and Weigert Creek. In the East Flathead snowmobiles are allowed on the middle pass and Pollock creek from Nov. 1st to May 31st. In the Upper Flathead snowmobiles are allowed from Nov. 1st to May 31st. In the remaining AMAs; Chauncey Todhunter, Corbin, Galton Range, Grave Prairie, Upper Wigwam, and Wigwam Flats, snowmobiles are not allowed anywhere unless the road is marked as open year round.

It would serve a great benefit, in promoting AMA awareness, to work with Alberta interest groups and media outlets to promote education regarding access closures in the Alexander, Corbin, and East Flathead AMAs which are accessible from Alberta staging areas.

It would also be beneficial to approach all industry personnel (Mine/Forestry companies and contractors) and to educate them regarding the AMAs where they may be operating. This would make it possible to ensure that all industry users are operating within their permits. It would also provide a direct contact for industry workers who may report issues of non-compliance or potential concern. Developing industry contact may also provide an opportunity to devise innovative ways to deactivate and manage non-motorized areas.

An issue which is consistently brought to the attention of officers in the field is that AMA users who do not hunt are unaware that they should be referencing the hunting synopsis to become familiar with access regulations. Outreach and education efforts with recreational clubs and other stakeholders, media releases, and posting signs are methods being used to disseminate information; but more could be done. Other possible approaches to this issue would be to have AMA areas included in future editions of the Backroad Mapbook and BC Recreational Atlas. Providing handout maps to local off-road vehicle rental businesses may also help spread information to the uninformed user group. Another solution would be to consider developing a Recreational Regulation Synopsis which outlines all of the relevant rules/regulation in a regional format, much like the Fishing/Hunting & Trapping synopses do.

Maintaining a clear focus on its goals and objectives are critical for the Access Guardian program's success and evolution. A way to identify possible objectives and future strategies to improve delivery is to survey users. A proposal for such a survey is being developed, unfortunately there was insufficient time to review, amend and complete the survey project. There is much to be gained from public input and it may serve a great benefit if a survey were obtained.

Any comments or suggestions regarding the Access Guardian Program are welcome and should be directed to the Conservation Officer responsible for the Access Guardian Program.

Conclusion

The 2011 Access Guardian Program appears to have addressed its requirements as per the current MoU among stakeholders. A significant portion (76%) of the time committed to the position by the COS was spent away from the office and dedicated to the AMA mandate. Contact was also made with a large number of users, these contact opportunities were used to promote awareness of access issues and regulations and it is believed that the information is spreading among the public. It is also believed that the public currently supports the position and the relatively permanent status of the program will likely strengthen this support. There are many benefits to be reaped from the guardian program and its continued operation will help to protect the natural resources of the Elk Valley and improve the experience of its resource users.