



REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF WOOD BUFFALO



2022 URBAN SERVICE AREA OHV STRATEGIC PLAN



REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF WOOD BUFFALO

URBAN SERVICE AREA OHV STRATEGIC PLAN (2022)

PREPARED BY



PREPARED FOR



REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
OF **WOOD BUFFALO**

JUNE 2022

Cover photo courtesy of Dennis Norman



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In 2016 the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) completed a municipality-wide Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Master Plan. This plan was grounded by significant engagement with local stakeholders and other residents of the Municipality. As this 2016 plan was finalized the RMWB experienced the historic wildfire that caused drastic changes to many natural areas surrounding various communities. Several firebreaks were developed around the Urban Service Area and large tracts of land that were once dense natural forest had burned. As a result, much more access for OHVs surrounding the Urban Service Area was created. This is one of the primary changes to the landscape that warranted an update to the 2016 OHV Master Plan. The 2022 Urban Service Area OHV Strategic Plan provides recommendations to mitigate these, amongst other challenges in and around the Urban Service Area. This Strategic Plan does not address land in Hamlets or other rural communities outside the Urban Service Area.

The Strategic Plan process began with engagement with various local stakeholders, as well as a municipality-wide public engagement opportunity. Feedback received came with diverse representation from both OHV users and non-users. Data from prior community engagement was also used, including from the previous master plan process as well as a public engagement campaign in 2019 that focussed on OHV use. The engagement process in 2021 included feedback from approximately 2,200 respondents. Approximately 20% of these respondents are non-OHV users. 63% of respondents supported the development of additional staging areas, and 89% think that residents living within a certain distance of OHV trails and staging areas should be able to drive OHVs directly from their homes to staging areas along designated routes. A key recommendation of this plan is to continue rigorous community engagement regarding OHVs, particularly as changes to the OHV Bylaw are considered.

The Urban Service Area currently has four designated OHV staging areas where loading and off-loading is permitted that allows for direct access to the network of OHV trails surrounding Fort McMurray. Each of the staging areas provide different support amenities, such as the Tom Weber Park and Boat Launch having both a boat launch and a permanent ramp for OHV loading and off-loading; the Tower Road / Timberlea OHV staging area is only an unimproved parking lot area with no permanent features. This study identified the need to provide enhancements to some of the existing

staging areas. Due to demand to access OHV trails at the far north and south of the Urban Service Area, this plan identified the need to build two new staging areas, as shown on Figure 4. An example of a proposed staging area is in Parson's Creek, a new growth area of Fort McMurray at the far north side of the Urban Service Area that will provide direct access to those trails north of the community.

The Municipality receives numerous complaints from residents regarding illegal use of OHVs in and around the Urban Service Area. This plan reviewed "OHV hotspots" which are the more prevalent locations that complaints refer to and where noticeable damages can be found. These hotspots were initially identified in the 2016 plan, and this Strategic Plan confirmed that these hotspots are relatively unchanged. Recommendations to address concerns at these hotspots have been identified, such as controlling access with blocking openings, decommissioning trails and increased enforcement.

There are a number of existing education, communication and training initiatives related to OHVs at the local, provincial and national level. These initiatives encourage safe, fun and sustainable OHV use. Rather than reinventing communication tools, the RMWB is encouraged to work with the various other organizations to obtain literature and to get advice on managing OHVs. Examples include the Provincial "Respect the Land" program and ATV Safety Watch Program developed by the Canadian All-Terrain Vehicle Distributors Council. An important partner available to provide advice on OHV management is the Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association that advocates for sustainable recreational trails in Alberta.

A review of approximately 15 comparable communities across western Canada identified how other municipalities accommodate or altogether prohibit OHV use within their limits. It is important to recognize that OHV use is also a Provincial jurisdiction. This Strategic Plan clearly identifies the limitations in what aspects of OHV use can be regulated by the RMWB, and which ones are Provincially regulated. The review of best practices and approaches taken by other municipalities found that there is a very wide range of approaches to regulating OHV use and techniques used to mitigate for unauthorized OHV use in their communities. In summary there are many examples of communities that allow OHV use within their

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

municipal limits, while being supported by municipal bylaws that come with some limitations.

One of the most significant recommendations of this plan is to conduct a thorough assessment outside of this strategic plan process to allow OHVs in certain areas of the public realm, such as giving residents access directly from their own property to designated OHV corridors that then lead outside the Urban Service Area. This recommendation is a result of 89% of survey respondents who think that residents living within a certain distance of OHV trails and staging areas should be able to leave with an OHV from their homes. Prior to enacting this recommendation, a comprehensive review of public safety and future corridor alignments coupled with significant public engagement will be required.

This plan concludes with a series of immediate-, near- and long-term recommendations for OHV use and programming within the Urban Service Area. Examples of immediate-term recommendations include reviewing the current bylaw that regulates OHV use within the urban service area, upgrading the Abasand and Tower Road OHV staging areas and developing an OHV advisory group to create and foster partnerships with various user groups and stakeholders. Examples of near-term recommendations include implementing a signage and wayfinding plan for all OHV trails, staging areas and amenities, implementing two new OHV staging areas and creating a meaningful relationship with Search and Rescue looking at effective incident reporting and response. Examples of long-term recommendations include monitoring the success of implemented recommendations and continued engagement with the community. The report goes into further detail with each of the 15 recommendations. As an example, a list of desired amenities at the designated OHV staging areas have been listed such as parking areas, trail maps provided, OHV off-loading ramps and public washrooms. The suggested amenities are intended to encourage legal OHV use, and ideally promote OHV use to current non-users and visitors to Fort McMurray.







1.0

INTRODUCTION

1.1 PLAN PURPOSE

Following the 2016 Wildfire and FireSmart landscaping, many of the greenbelt areas in the Urban Service Area have changed. These changes have created both challenges with unauthorized OHV use and opportunities to enhance responsible use.

This Off-Highway Vehicle Strategic Plan has been prepared for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo to provide recommendations to mitigate these challenges while encouraging responsible use, specifically in and around the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray.

While OHV Bylaws are not being changed as a part of this Strategic Plan, this plan does include various recommendations to review and adjust the current bylaws that are in place.

This plan seeks to provide strategic recommendations and priorities for maintenance, planning, design and implementation of OHV trails, staging areas and other amenities. The recommendations made in this plan are not only built upon the foundation of the 2016 OHV Master Plan, they are endorsed by the feedback received from the general public, OHV users, stakeholders and partners. The process for compiling this report was one of complete transparency with the public.

This plan will serve as a living document pertaining to OHV use and associated amenities. It is designed to grow and change as the Urban Service Area evolves.

Photo courtesy of Dennis Norman





2.0

PAST PLANS

2.1 OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE MASTER PLAN (2016)

In 2016, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo prepared an Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Master Plan (Figure 1) to address OHV use, issues and opportunities for the next ten years (2016-2026). The Plan sought a positive and integrated approach to issues and opportunities associated with 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 focused on trail planning and design considerations and illustrated a conceptual framework for trail development in the Fort McMurray region.

When the wildfires of 2016 came through Fort McMurray, the landscape was completely changed. This altered landscape was no longer compatible with the OHV Master Plan that had just been completed. As a result, this 2022 Off-Highway Strategic Plan seeks to update the previously completed master plan so that it is relevant to current times and the changed landscape. This plan seeks to use the 2016 plan as its foundation, building upon its findings and recommendations with a specific focus on the urban service area, which was greatly impacted by the wildfires.

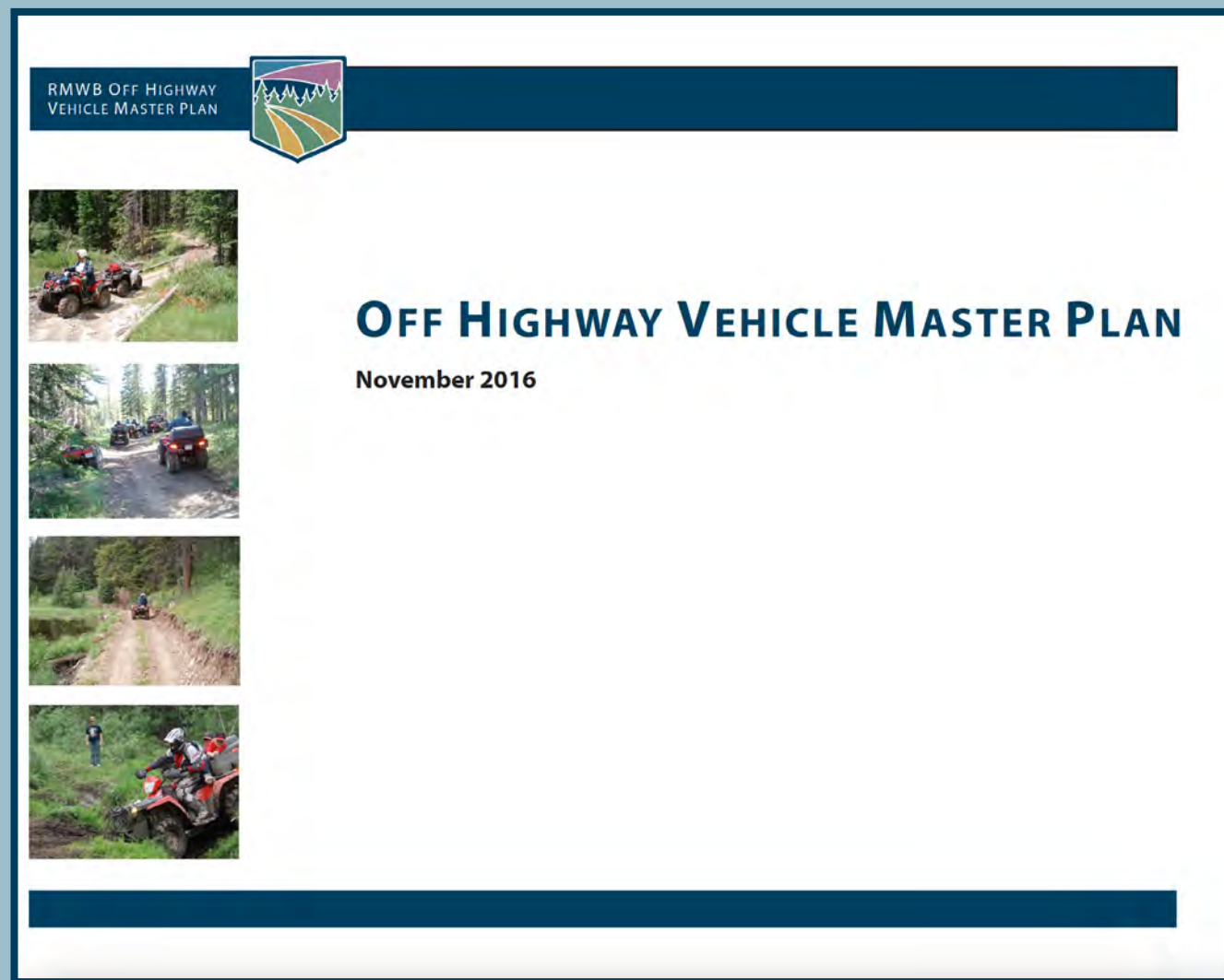


Figure 1: 2016 Off Highway Vehicle Master Plan



3.0

BACKGROUND

3.0 BACKGROUND

A key component in the development of the Urban Service Area OHV Strategic 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, partners and supports; the land use planning context and key regulators; existing trails and amenities; current educational initiatives; and current enforcement strategies.

3.1 CURRENT USERS

3.1.1 Local User Groups

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

McMurray Sno-Drifters Club

McMurray Sno-Drifters Club currently has just over 500 members, and at present maintains over 300 kilometers of trails in the Fort McMurray area. These trails exist on the Athabasca / Clearwater Rivers (east to Whitemud Falls and camping areas) and include the Stoney Mountain Trail, Anzac Trail, Connector Trail, Thickwood Trail (Tower Rd.) and Draper Trail. Unfortunately the Draper Trail has been closed until further notice due to a mud slide that washed out the trail. The Sno-Drifters are active in trail development, working with the RMWB, Alberta Environment and Parks 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 RMWB 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. The Sno-Drifters generously provided numerous photographs for use in this report which can be seen throughout.



Photo courtesy of the McMurray Sno-Drifters



Photo courtesy of Dennis Norman



Photo courtesy of the McMurray Sno-Drifters

McMurray Dirt Riders Association

McMurray Dirt Riders Association (MDRA) was established to represent dirt bikers, including competitive riders, in the Wood Buffalo region. The association has approximately 175 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. The MDRA generously provided numerous photographs by Dennis Norman for use in this report which can be seen throughout.

Other Informal User Groups

There are a number of other informal user groups in the Fort McMurray Region that are passionate about OHVs. The Fort Mac Poker Runners are one example of a local ATV and outdoor enthusiast group. This group of like-minded individuals are passionate about spending time out on the OHV trails. Other informal user groups include numerous social media pages such as Fort McMurray ATV & SLED and Fort Mac ATV Quads - UTV - SXS, each with over 1,000 members. While these groups may not be formalized associations, they carry the same passion for safe and responsible access to OHVs for all.

3.1.2 Provincial User Groups

Local groups work closely with their respective provincial organizations, which carry a valuable role providing information, coordinating and planning province-wide activities, and advocating for 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 associations' website as well as a regularly produced 'Trail Talk' newsletter.

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.

3.2 EXISTING TRAILS & 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 as well as protecting open space and trail assets and users.

3.2.1 OHV Staging Areas

As of 2021, there were a number of staging areas designated by the RMWB within in / straddling the Urban Service Area boundary (Figure 2). These include:

1. Tower Road / Timberlea - provides access to the Provincial Crown Land north west of Fort McMurray. At present, the staging area is an informal dirt/gravel parking lot that is frequently congested and lacking adequate space and amenities for parking trailers and off-loading OHVs;
2. Snye Park - Provides access to the Clearwater River for snowmobilers in winter months. Note that the OHV drop-off area is entirely on the ice, and that no OHV use is permitted on shore;
3. Abasand - Provides access to lands south of Fort McMurray between the Hangingstone and Horse Rivers. This site has recently been cleaned up, with dilapidated trailers and campers removed off-site. The facility is small, congested, and immediately adjacent to residential areas - posing challenges to the effective enforcement of existing bylaws; and
4. Horse Pasture Park (Waterways) - Provides access to the former rail bed southeast to Saprae Creek / Lynton. At present, the rail bed is groomed for winter use by the Sno-Drifters. Tom Weber Park and Boat Launch is an official OHV staging area (inclusive of an off-loading

ramp and direct access to OHV trails) and boat launch. Raphael Cree Park and Boat Launch is a boat launch and wintertime snowmobile staging area (with direct access to the river.

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.

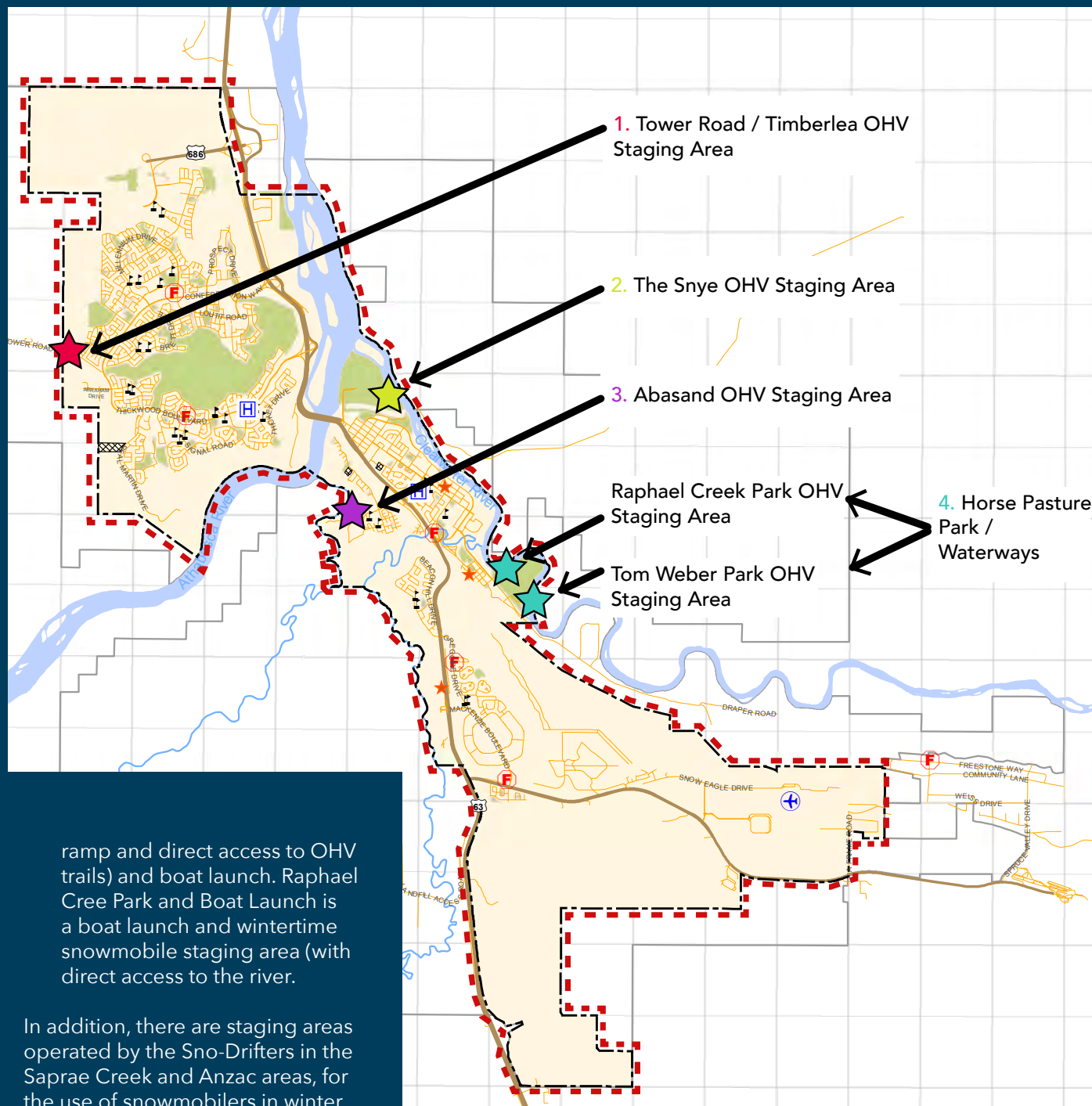


Figure 2: Designated Staging Areas

3.2.2 OHV Trails & Facilities

McMurray Sno-Drifters Trails

The Sno-Drifters presently maintain over 300 km of trails both south and north of Fort McMurray (Figure 3). 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 power line rights of way.

The club has also 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.

3.2.3 Other Recreational Amenities & 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;
- Vista Ridge Recreational Area - downhill skiing;
- Highway 63 fish ponds / day use area -south of Fort McMurray on Highway 63;
- Wood Bison Trails;
- Matcheetawin Discovery Trails;
- Birchwood Trails - 135 km of non-motorized trails

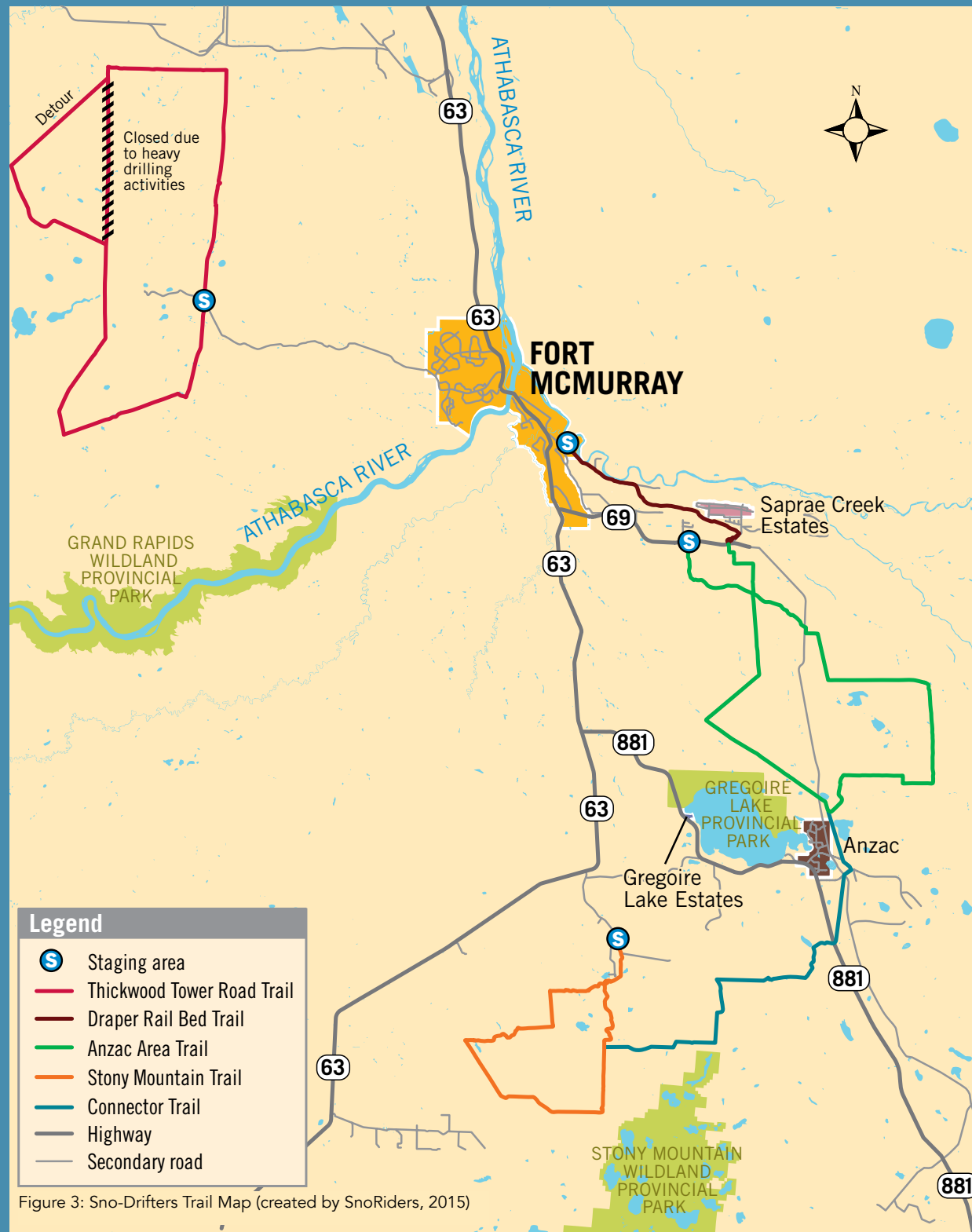


Figure 3: Sno-Drifters Trail Map (created by SnoRiders, 2015)

within Fort McMurray. These trails are commonly subject to trespass and damage by OHVs; and

- 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.

3.2.4 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 hectares 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.

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 hectares, 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 a former rail bed. The trail runs from Waskett (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.

3.3 OPPORTUNITIES & CONSTRAINTS

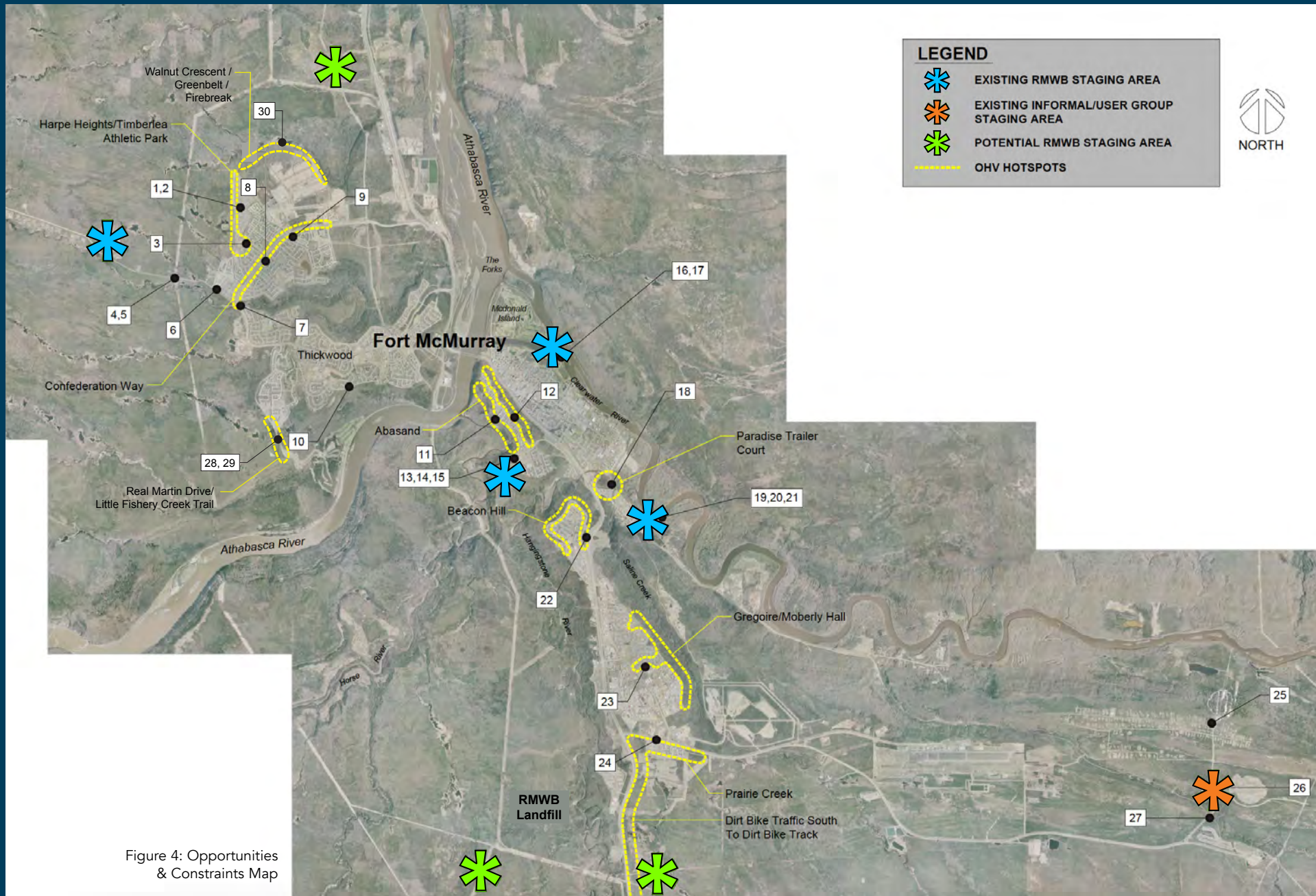
There are numerous opportunities and constraints pertaining to OHV use within the urban service area of Fort McMurray. The map on the following page (Figure 4) illustrates these.

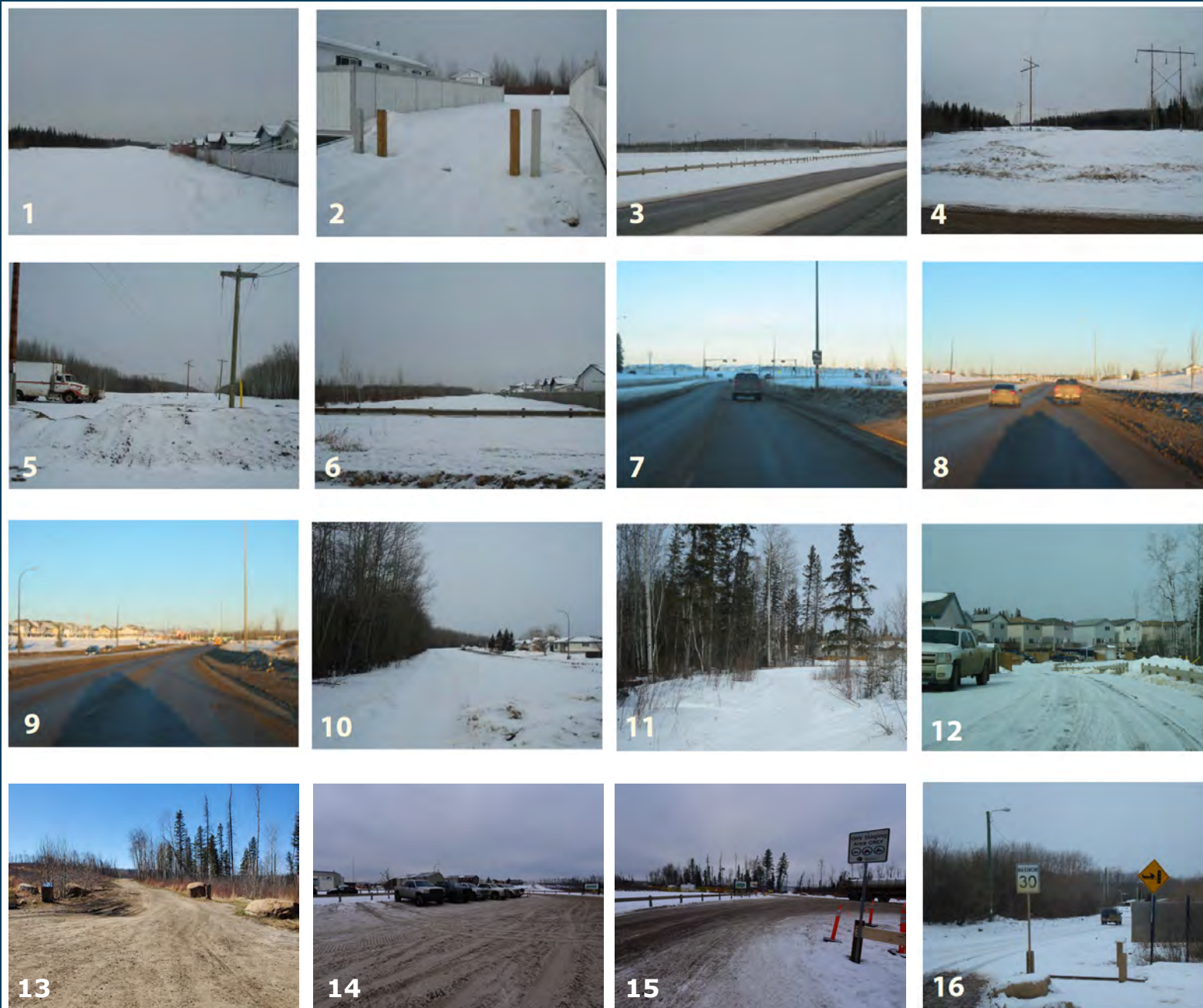
The four designated OHV staging areas that were noted in section 3.2.1 are identified on this map as well as any staging areas that are informal and/or managed by user groups.

Additionally, the map identifies "OHV Hotspots." These hotspots are essentially problem areas where illegal OHV use has been observed, OHVs are causing damage to natural areas, there are conflicts between OHVs and other trail users, or any other OHV-related problem or conflict. These hotspots, or areas of conflict, may require modifications to permitted uses, or various access control measures to further discourage OHV use. Sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 will delve further into these methods. Images of each hotspot can be seen in Figures 5 & 6.

The opportunities and constraints map (Figure 4) also identifies potential locations for future RMWB OHV staging areas. These locations were determined based on feedback from the community over the past ten years.

The Land Use Context Map (Figure 8) identifies opportunities for future OHV corridors that may connect various staging areas and residential areas to the OHV trails beyond the boundaries of the urban service area.





OHV Hotspots: Existing Conditions

- 1 - Harpe Heights berm
- 2 - Harpe Heights PUL
- 3 - Timberlea Athletic Park
- 4,5 - 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 OHV Staging Area
- 16 - Signage, Morimoto Drive

Figure 5: OHV Hotspots (Existing Conditions 1/2)



OHV Hotspots: Existing Conditions

- 17 - Snye Park
- 18 - Paradise Trailer Court
- 19,20- Horse Pasture Park
- 21 - Former rail bed 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 rail bed
- 28,29- Real Martin Drive / Little Fishery Creek Trail
- 30 - Walnut Crescent Greenbelt / Firebreak

Figure 6: OHV Hotspots (Existing Conditions 2/2)

3.3.1 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.

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 (i.e. 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.

Another tool that can be used to prevent OHV use on certain trails, while still allowing pedestrians and cyclists to gain access, is to naturalize the trail and trailhead. The addition of dense native plantings and placement of boulders to narrow the trail and trailhead to the minimum allowable width, while meeting the trail classification standards for accessibility, would further serve to discourage OHV use while not impeding on the visual quality of the trails and surrounding areas.

3.3.2 Decommissioning Trails

In addition to the various control measures mentioned above to protect park, open space and trail assets and users, this plan also recommends techniques to decommission and restore both formalized and unofficial OHV trails that are no longer in use.

Figure 7 shows examples of standard restorative techniques that can be used to renaturalize these trails in order to decommission their use. Methods used include dense native plantings and the scattering of boulders to block access and restore the area so that it no longer can be used or mistaken as a trail.

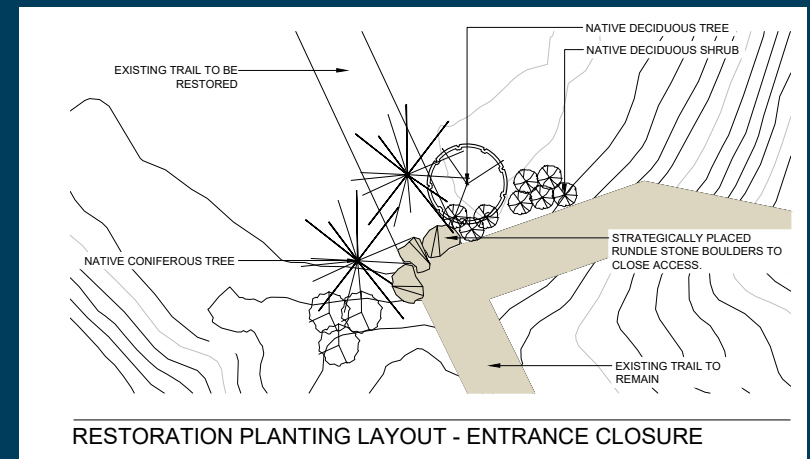
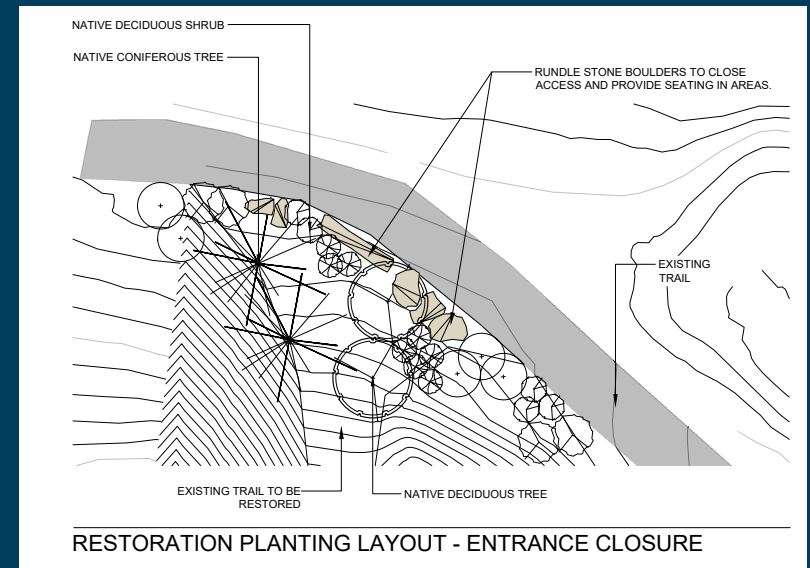
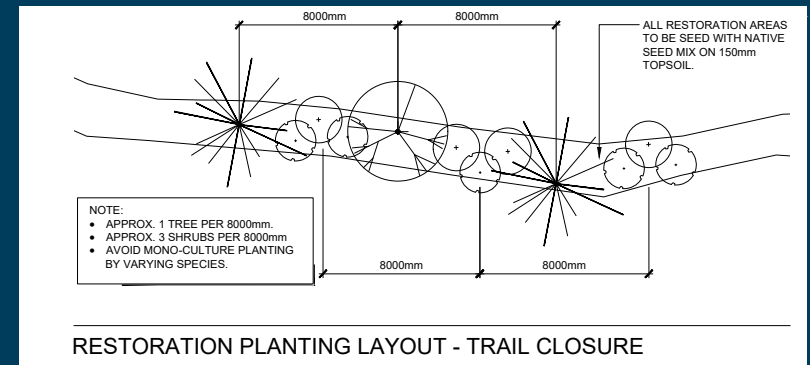


Figure 7: Standard Restorative Techniques

3.4 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 throughout Canada.

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 bylaws on the type of use, speed limits, insurance, wearing of helmets and in some cases specific seasons of use (i.e. 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; and
- **Marketing** - Where trails are designed to attract visitors or tourists (i.e. 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 A.

Photo courtesy of Dennis Norman



3.5 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.

3.5.1 Local User Resources

Websites

Locally, the McMurray Sno-Drifters and McMurray Dirt Riders Association both 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 (i.e. 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.

3.5.2 Education Programs & Activities

Ongoing RCMP and Bylaw Community Outreach

The Fort McMurray RCMP Detachment and RMWB Bylaw have for some time taken an active role in educating the public about the laws and bylaws



Photo courtesy of Dennis Norman

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 traveled to Fort Chipewyan in the Fall of 2008 to meet with the community and clarify municipal bylaws related to OHV use. As a follow up, the RCMP Public Education Officer initiated the development of pamphlets on OHV use in rural hamlets (with their own unique OHV bylaw). 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 Bylaw have been actively working directly with user groups promoting safe riding. For example, in the Fall of 2008 both the RCMP and Bylaw 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 Bylaw 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 (i.e. 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 (i.e. protective gear, riding habits); a basic understanding of laws (in particular, the Traffic Safety Act); and basic etiquette (i.e. 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 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.

3.5.3 Safety Training Operations

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 snow pack 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.

Canadian ATV Safety Institute (CASI) ATV RiderCourse

This hands-on ATV safety program has been designed to offer required safety information in a concentrated course that runs for 4½ hours. The half-day session includes both theoretical and hands-on-practice where students learn skills and understanding required for safe and responsible ATV operation.

Photo courtesy of Dennis Norman



The CASI ATV RiderCourse is supported and endorsed by the Canadian Off Highway Vehicle Distributors Council and is recognized by the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council which works to create a positive future for responsible OHV recreation.

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; and
- training available for Search and Rescue Society volunteers.

3.5.4 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.

Family Safe Ride

The Family Safe Ride day is an annual event hosted by the McMurray Sno-Drifters for both their existing members and new people looking to explore their trails, meet people and learn how to be safe when they ride. The day is filled with food and drink by the fire, free trail rides and guided rides so that everyone can get out on the trails and learn how to recreate safely.

3.5.5 Other Communication Partners & 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 (the former) Northern Lights Health Region, RCMP, RMWB Bylaw, 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 Buckle Up Wood Buffalo; 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



Photo courtesy of Dennis Norman



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 McMurray Sno-Drifters club and other OHV organizations - 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 (i.e. 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



Photo courtesy of Dennis Norman

information related to trail amenities, safe OHV use, licensing, etc. Dealers are represented by Canadian All-Terrain Vehicle Distributors Council.

3.5.6 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.



4.0

**ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN,
LAND USE CONTEXT &
LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK**

4.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

The general ecological classification for land around the urban service area is Central Mixedwood Forest. This area is generally characterized by muskeg, wetland and fen ecosystems, with luvisolic soils in upland areas and organic soils in poorly drained areas. From a hydrologic perspective, surface water features include deeply incised river courses, lakes and significant areas of poorly drained fens and muskeg. Significant moose and caribou habitat exists in the areas around Fort McMurray, and in these areas there are significant limitations due to access and activity. Generally wet ecosystems present the following challenges as it relates to OHV use:

- high potential for rutting as a result of unstable soils and trails. Deep ruts can pool and retain water during summer months which does not allow trail surfaces to dry, hence causing more and more rutting as time goes on;
- significant erosion and sedimentation caused by soil particles being dislodged and transported by water;
- unpredictable ground conditions that can cause machines to be stuck or otherwise challenged to drive safely;
- when trail alignments become flooded the temptation for riders to drive around obstacles and create new trail access routes cause more widespread damage to land; and
- during frozen conditions, soft, wet and often unstable ground often exists beneath frozen surfaces. Freezing conditions are not always consistent and OHVs fall through the frozen layer there can be unknown depths of voids or water beneath the surface causing significant risk to riders and damage to the natural environment.

This study does not include a detailed wildlife assessment or ecological classification. It is recommended that more detailed biophysical assessment and risk evaluation be conducted as part of any site and route selection for new trails, the detailed design of new amenities and the implementation and maintenance program for new OHV trails and staging areas.

4.2 LAND USE CONTEXT

4.2.1 Residential Development

A large portion of the land within the urban service area is designated as residential development, with a range of land uses, densities and development patterns. Future residential development is being directed to specific urban growth areas located inside of a proposed ring road (see

Figure 8). As new residential areas are developed it is important to consider OHV access points and the designated staging areas, ensuring that these staging areas do not become landlocked and cut off from direct access from the staging area to the surrounding undeveloped lands where OHV use is permitted. Current development areas of concern include new growth areas in Parson's Creek as well as in Waterways and Draper. New roads and urban development areas need to consider the required access of OHVs between existing staging areas and land beyond urban development.

The current development patterns for new growth areas include traditional streets and either monolithic or separate sidewalks, and at times the development of back lanes for services, parking and additional access. A network of public utility lots (PULs) also spans across the urban service area, providing routes for underground and surface utilities. In some areas, regional gas and petrochemical pipeline rights-of-way cross through Fort McMurray, and in many instances include pedestrian walkways and public open space for passive recreation. There is high demand from OHV users to access staging areas and permitted OHV trails from residential areas. Public input received during the course of this study, as noted in Section 5.0, demonstrates a high proportion of those surveyed who would like to develop stronger connections between homes and OHV use areas. In most cases within the urban service area, should OHVs be permitted to travel from residential areas to the surrounding lands, travel on public roads and along PULs would be required.

Lands beyond the urban service area are 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 certification of the Gateway Hill area by Syncrude.

4.2.2 Recreational Development

The entire urban service area is filled with a network of recreation areas, including formal parks, walkways, linear park systems and PULs with a recreational function. Many Environmental Reserve (ER) areas also provide a recreational function having formal or informal trails, gathering spaces and other areas for nature enjoyment. Both the site investigation and stakeholder engagement process identified a significant amount of trespassing by OHV

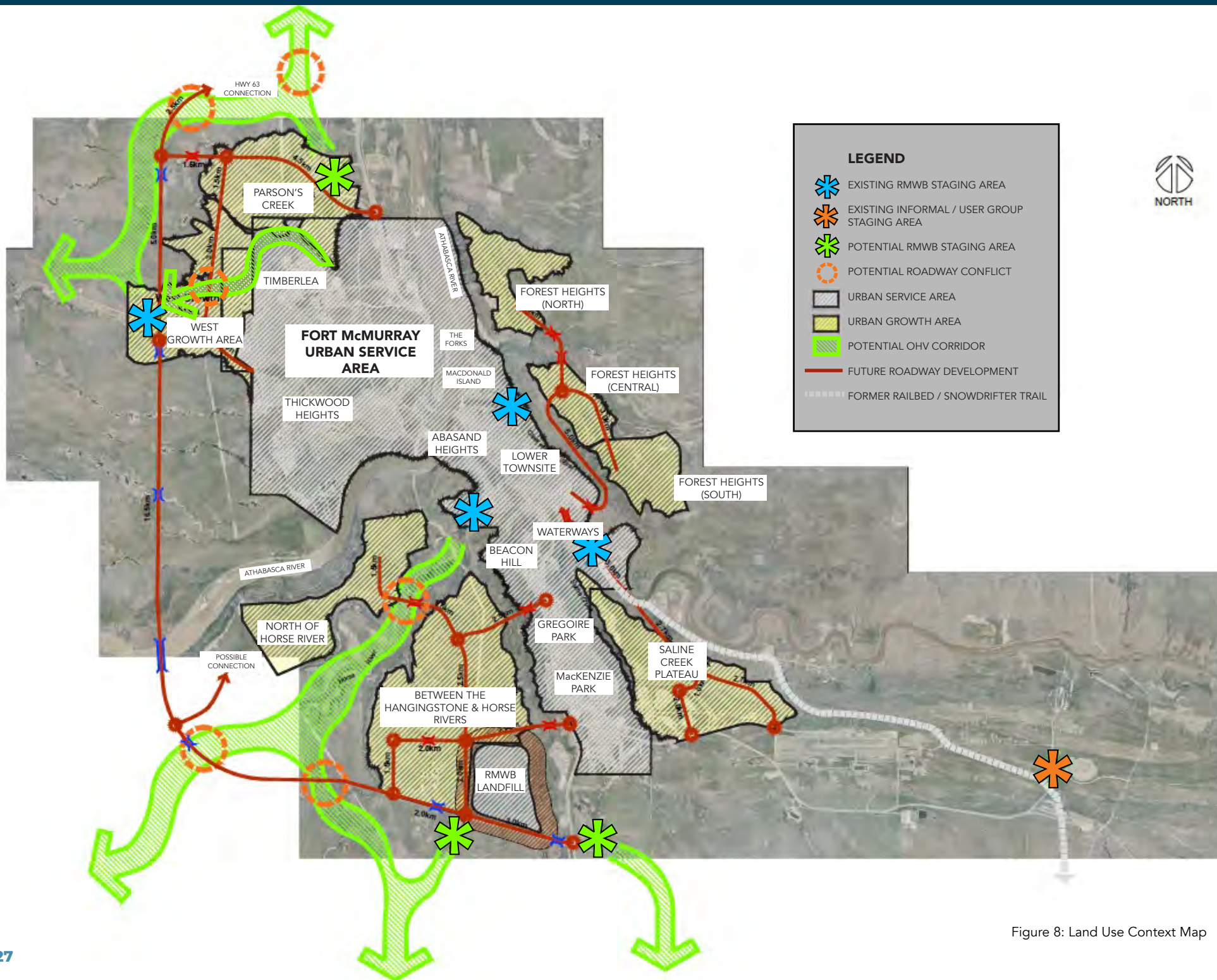


Figure 8: Land Use Context Map

users within these recreational lands, and in some cases physical damage caused by OHV traffic. Current OHV bylaws do not allow OHV use within any public park or open space within the urban service area.

Over recent years, the RMWB has overseen the development of a new downtown plan as well as preliminary planning for the Clearwater River and Snye waterfront development. At the time of completing this report, the RMWB had just embarked on a new waterfront plan for the Clearwater and Snye. Past and current waterfront planning validate the importance of connecting the downtown of Fort McMurray with the Rivers and the lands beyond, particularly for boats in the summer and snowmobiles in the winter. 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 (i.e. races) become established on the Clearwater River, opportunities should be sought to ensure park areas are designed for year-round use with appropriate facilities.

As part of recent improvements at Snye Point Park as well as Horse Pasture Park, upgraded OHV staging areas have been developed. Snye Point Park is a popular destination for residents to gather and enjoy direct contact and views of the Snye and the Clearwater River. New boat launches and adjacent parking has been recently implemented which provides great access for boats in the summer and snowmobiles in the winter. Other recent developments at Horse Pasture Park has brought new boat launches, improved parking, support amenities such as a new gazebo shelter and a permanent OHV off-loading ramp. While these two formal OHV staging areas are meant to serve OHV loading and off-loading, they also serve as an important recreational area for non-OHV users.

4.2.3 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 south-east 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. The traditional land interests of Indigenous communities are mostly focused outside the urban service area, however traditional land uses are significant. As a result, targeted consultation with these communities to identify the location of significant sites is a critical component of conceptual trail alignment and land use selection.

Photo courtesy of Dennis Norman



4.2.4 Traditional Land Uses and Stakeholders: 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.

4.3 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

4.3.1 Municipal Bylaws

OHV Bylaws

The RMWB established four separate bylaws directly related to OHV use and regulation, each of which cover a different geographical area:

- Off Highway Vehicle Bylaw - Urban Service Area: a bylaw to regulate the use of off-highway vehicles within the Fort McMurray Urban Service Area of the RMWB;
- Off Highway Vehicle Bylaw - Fort Chipewyan: a bylaw authorizing the operation of off-highway vehicles on roadways located in the Hamlet of Fort Chipewyan within the RMWB;
- Off Highway Vehicle Bylaw - Sapræ Creek: a bylaw authorizing the operation of off-highway vehicles on roadways located in the Hamlet of Sapræ Creek within the RMWB; and

- Off Highway Vehicle Bylaw - Anzac and Gregoire Lake: a bylaw that authorizes the operations of off-highway vehicles on roadways located in the Hamlet of Anzac and Gregoire Lake within the RMWB.

This Strategic Plan focuses on only the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray. The following summary reflects current permitted operations and use of OHVs within the study area:

- bylaws are enforced by bylaw enforcement officers of the RMWB;
- there are four designated areas within the Urban Service Area where OHV off-loading, loading and staging is permitted and there are designated routes leading from these staging areas to lands outside the Urban Service Area boundaries;
- no OHVs are permitted on any highway, roadway or public land within Fort McMurray unless a special permit is issued by the Regional Clerk or other officer authorized by the RMWB Council;
- no OHV may be operated, even at authorized designated areas, between the hours of 10:00pm and 7:00am without a special permit; and
- all OHV operations must conform to this Bylaw as well as all laws and regulation applying to the operation of a motor vehicle in the provisions of the Highway Traffic Act. A detailed description of the Highway Traffic Act is below.

Some of the recommendations of this master plan will require an amendment to the Off Highway Vehicle Bylaw (Urban Service Area) which must go through a formal process through the RMWB Council.



Photo courtesy of Dennis Norman

Noise Bylaw

The RMWB Noise Bylaw prohibits certain activities creating noise and to abate the incidence of noise and to restrict the hours when certain sounds may be made. The Municipal Government Act provides that a municipality has the authority to pass such bylaws for the purpose of controlling noise. While OHVs are not specifically identified, vehicles and motor vehicles are listed which cover OHVs as a type of motor vehicle. The Bylaw identifies that no person shall allow property belonging to them that creates any unnecessary noise or any noise whatsoever which either annoys, disturbs, injures, endangers or detracts from the comfort, repose, health, peace or safety of persons within the limits of the Municipality.

4.3.2 Provincial Legislation

Traffic Safety Act

The Province of Alberta's Traffic Safety Act (formerly the Highway Traffic Act), last updated in December 2020, governs and regulates the use of vehicles on public roadways and other lands. In some circumstances, the Act allows Municipalities to control and manage public roadways and other infrastructure related to motor vehicles under its direction, control and management by making bylaws that are not inconsistent with the Act, such as governing:

- the use of highways;

- the parking of vehicles,
- the establishment and use of parking places that are for the exclusive use of persons with disabilities;
- access to highways from private land;
- fees charged with respect to the parking on vehicles;
- classifying motor vehicles and other vehicles and pedestrians for any purposes involving the use of streets, lanes and other public places;
- with respect to noise produced in connection with a vehicle;
- closing or restricting the use of a highway;
- restricting the use of specific traffic lanes to specific vehicles or classes of vehicles; and
- the issuing of tags, tickets or other documents, amongst others.

Some of the primary aspects of the Traffic Safety Act that are relevant to OHV use includes:

- licenses, registration, insurance and permits for all motor vehicles;
- inspection of vehicles, accidents and the sale or transfer of vehicles;
- disqualification from driving due to offenses;
- speed limits and traffic control devices;
- a specific section related to off-highway vehicles; and
- enforcement, rights, remedies and obligations.

The Act clearly defines what an OHV is, with descriptions of the various types of vehicles that are both land- and water-based. All OHVs must be properly licensed and insured when used on public land or on land not



Photo courtesy of Dennis Norman

owned by the registered vehicle owner. Whether on private or other lands, a driver must not drive without due care and attention. A driver may lawfully cross any highway, roadway, parking lane or sidewalk portion of the highway if the driver stops the OHV before driving across, all passengers disembark from the vehicle, the driver yields to all other vehicles and the driver waits to proceed until the condition of the traffic being entered on is safe.

Whether OHVs are on or off a highway, no municipality has the power to make a bylaw that forbids the operation of OHVs, requires from any owner or driver of an OHV any tax, fee, license or permit for the use possession or operation of an OHV, or affects in any way the registration or numbering of OHVs. Peace officers have the authority to stop any OHV at any time, and demand copies of licenses and registrations. Upon any accident a driver of an OHV has the same obligations as a driver of a passenger vehicle, such as the need to remain on the scene unless otherwise directed by a peace officer, produce personal information of the driver and any witnesses, report all damages, etc.

In essence a municipality may not create bylaws that are inconsistent or contradict the Traffic Safety Act. The only exception is setting maximum speed limits respecting the operations of OHVs with respect to property that is not a highway, that is located within the municipality and to which members of the public have access while operating OHVs. Helmets are now mandatory for all OHV users, with exception to driving on a First Nations' reserve, a Métis settlement, while performing farming or ranching work or when using an OHV that is equipped with roll bars or a fixed and reinforced roof structure.

Alberta Environment and Parks

Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) is the primary Provincial department that supports environmental conservation and protection, sustainable economic prosperity, quality of life and outdoor recreation opportunities. This Provincial department manages fish and wildlife, over-sees development of Alberta's forests and manages the use of public lands. Understanding relevant provincial regulations and AEP management guidelines is critical to the successful planning and design of OHV trails. The following Provincial Acts under AEP jurisdiction that are important to OHV use management and planning:

- Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act - includes regulatory requirements through which air, water, land and biodiversity are managed. This Act supports and promotes the protection, enhancement and wise use of the environment by designating proposed activities for

which an approval or registration is required;

- Environmental Assessment Regulation - provides the rules, provisions and stipulations to formally examine a project to determine what the environmental, social, economic and health implications may be. The environmental assessment process within the regulation is used to predict environmental effects of proposed initiatives before they are carried out;
- Public Lands Act - establishes the role of the Alberta government in managing public land. It sets out mechanisms by which rights in public land may be transferred by lease or sale. It provides for and defines the powers of the Minister and the Lieutenant Governor in Council with respect to establishing regulations to govern use and allocation of public land. The Act and its regulations also control public land use through the establishment of public land use zones, recreation areas and trails. The Act provides for appropriate use and management of public land and for the classification of the public land base in Alberta, applies to naturally occurring waterways of its bed and shore, and within the Study Area would include the various rivers and streams that surround Fort McMurray and any other naturally occurring water body or watercourse that is under jurisdiction of the Province. This Act has significant relevance to OHV trail development as it includes provisions for how land is classified, how land can be purchased, occupied and leased, disposition of land, various unauthorized uses of public lands and enforcements. This Act also describes limitations with access for recreational purposes;
- Water Act - supports and promotes the conservation and management of water, through the use and allocation of water in Alberta. It requires the establishment of a water management framework and sets out requirements for the preparation of water management plans. The Act addresses: Albertans' rights to divert water and describes the priority of water rights among users; the types of instruments available for diversion and use of water and the associated processes for decision-making; and the range of enforcement measures available to ensure the goals of the Act are met. Any surface water that is permanent is claimed by the Crown, and therefore any activity that involves any proposed use or alteration of this system requires permitting. In the case of alteration or loss of such areas, compensation may be required. The Horse River, for example, would be a provincially claimed water body, and any trails developed along the shore of the River may be subject to review by AEP should it demonstrate any effect on the water body. Trail development near other naturally occurring creeks, ravines and water bodies (including wetlands) may also be subject to Water Act review. Any proposed water crossing such as a bridge or boardwalk, or trails that are proposed in close proximity of these water bodies would prompt a Water



Act review;

- Wildlife Act - prohibits any disturbance to a nest or den of prescribed wildlife, including the alteration or removal of existing vegetation. A wildlife assessment may be required by the Province to confirm the presence of any nest or den prior to the development of new trails, or the reclamation of disturbed areas. Assessments of migratory bird nesting are also required under Federal legislation, specifically the Migratory Birds Convention Act; and
- Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act - establishes a legislated process for environmental assessments, and ensures potential environmental impacts are identified early in the planning stages. More detailed environmental assessments may be required for sensitive and significant ecological areas.

Department of Agriculture and Forestry

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is responsible for the policies, legislation, regulations, programs, and services that enable Alberta's agriculture, food, and forest sectors to grow, prosper, and diversify. The ministry's role is diverse, ranging from wildfire and forest management to food safety and sustainable agriculture. Agriculture and Forestry also works to help support the quality of life in Alberta's rural communities. As it relates to OHV planning and use, the following Provincial Acts pertaining to the Department of Agriculture and Forestry are important in OHV planning and regulation:

- 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; and
- The Forest and Prairie Protection Act - enables the protection of the forests and prairies of Alberta from wildfire. It establishes the Fire

Season and enables cost recovery and fire control orders. The Act also identifies firefighting responsibilities and describes the authority of forest officers and fire guardians. It provides conditions for conducting industrial operations and other human activities and identifies offenses and penalties.

Department of Culture and Tourism

This Provincial department 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:

1. 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;
2. Wildland Provincial Parks also preserve natural heritage, but in less accessible sites; activities are more 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:
 - a. Stony Mountain Wildland Provincial Park, featuring backcountry camping and hiking;
 - b. Whitemud Falls Wildland Provincial Park, featuring limited backcountry camping accessible by boat or OHV; and
 - c. Grand Rapids Wildland Provincial Park, featuring cabin rentals accessible by boat or OHV.
3. 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:
 - a. Hangingstone Provincial Recreational Area, featuring a day use area and 56 campsites; and
 - b. 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.

Lands within the urban service area of the RMWB are not subject to the rule of Provincial land classifications, however many of the trails leading out of Fort McMurray lead into Provincial land. This plan recommends that any upgraded or newly proposed staging area be planned exclusively on Municipal land and that proper notification and coordination of any proposed trails on Provincial land be completed with the Province of Alberta.





4.3.3 Federal Legislation

There are a variety of guidelines and Acts at the federal level that pertain to the planning, implementation and management of an OHV trail system. The following are the key documents that pertain to OHVs:

- Fisheries Act - authorizations are required for any habitat that is or has the potential to be fish habitat; triggered when development leads to the harmful alteration, disruption or destruction of this habitat. Fisheries and Oceans Canada review would be required for any water body or watercourse, regardless of it being naturally occurring or human created;
- Navigable Waters Protection Act - in this case would only apply to any alteration to the waters or shoreline of rivers and streams, such as boat launches, bridges, trails that lead to the water's edge, etc.;
- Canadian Environmental Assessment Act - would only apply to OHV planning should any federal funding be obtained for development;
- Migratory Birds Convention Act - prohibits any disturbance to bird species covered under the act, such as removal of vegetation or water from nesting areas. The construction of trails that adversely affect migratory birds will not be permissible at certain times of the year. It is recommended that all proposed trail alignments and sites of reclamation activities be reviewed by a qualified professional prior to any work; and
- Species at Risk Act - prohibits the disturbance to any species listed in the act that are deemed species-at-risk. It is recommended that all proposed trail alignments and sites of reclamation activities are reviewed by a qualified professional prior to any work.



5.0

ENGAGEMENT

This Master Planning exercise was executed over the course of 10 years. In the first stages of the project (approx. 2001) 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. These findings helped to shape the 2016 OHV Master Plan report.

In 2020, the RMWB began an update to the original Master Plan with a specific focus on the Urban Service Area. Throughout the course of the Urban Service Area OHV Strategic Plan, further consultation was sought with key stakeholders, the general public and both Indigenous and rural partners. At the onset of the project, two targeted workshops were held. The first workshop was geared towards key stakeholders and the second was tailored to Indigenous and rural partners. Both workshops were intended to determine broad priorities and objectives for an update to the OHV Master Plan in the urban service area. Participants were encouraged to share ideas on current challenges, potential mitigation strategies, and discuss how the previous plan succeeded or where adjustments should be made. Following this workshop, participants were asked to share further feedback by completing short online engagement activities using the online platform, *Participate Wood Buffalo*, available at rmwb.ca/ohv. Once all relevant data was collected from stakeholders and partners, the general public was engaged.

This resulting 2022 Strategic Plan was shaped entirely based upon the findings of this decade of community input.



5.1 PREVIOUS ENGAGEMENT

5.1.1 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 (i.e. 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 (i.e. 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 (i.e. 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 (i.e. surface and subsurface leases / AEP);
- 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 learned 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.

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

5.1.3 Public Engagement Campaign: *Have Your Say: OHV Use in Our Community* - February-April 2019

In February 2019, the public engagement campaign *Have Your Say: OHV Use in Our Community* was launched. While gathering of feedback, input and ideas is always ongoing, the public portion of the campaign closed on April 1 with the closing of the online survey. This phase also featured three public engagement sessions – two at the Syncrude Athletic Park Clubhouse in Timberlea and one at the Suncor Community Leisure Centre at MacDonald Island.

The campaign was targeted at residents in Fort McMurray, however all residents of the region were open to participate. The public engagement process helped educate residents on the various interconnected issues related to OHV use in the community and gathered preliminary information

from the public on how they would like to best see OHV use managed from a municipal perspective. There were over 3,800 participants in the online survey and nearly 100 in-person interactions at the three engagement sessions.

One component of the campaign focused on the idea of a permanent, heavy-duty chain-link fence being installed near the Walnut Crescent and McKinlay Crescent areas in Timberlea (in 2019) and then in some parts of Abasand and Gregoire (in 2020), the second phase being subject to how the first phase (Timberlea) is experienced by residents.

This project was formally approved in the 2019 capital budget at an overall estimated cost of \$1.77M, with the expectation that public engagement on the idea would take place in advance of any fence being potentially installed.

Based on the initial results of the engagement process, the proposed chain-link fence was eliminated as a potential illegal use mitigation measure and communicated publicly in advance of the first public session. It should be noted that most residents in attendance at the sessions were aware the proposed chain-link fence had been removed by the Municipality as an option. Overall, about 80% of participants indicated they “strongly disagree” with the proposed fence project and another 11% stating they “disagree” with the project. Only 6% of participants either “agree” or “strongly agree” that the project should proceed as approved.

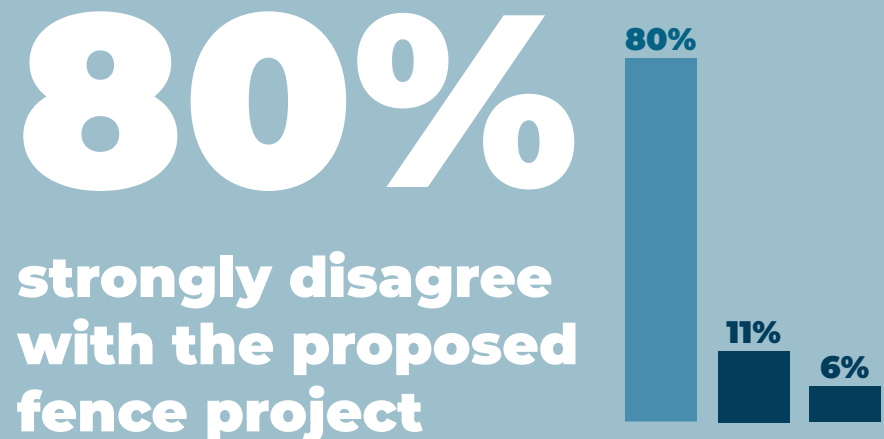


Figure 9: Level of support for the proposed fence project

Other notable results include:

- **89%** strongly agree/agree that OHV use should be expected in our community;
- **88%** strongly agree/agree we should take a holistic, community-based approach to OHV management, including development of an OHV Master Plan;
- **87%** strongly agree/agree we should be concerned about the use of additional physical barriers due to the impact on the natural environment while limiting trail/ access to nature;
- **85%** strongly agree/agree we should not increase the use of physical barriers to curb illegal OHV use;
- **85%** strongly agree/agree we should continue to focus on education and enforcement, while promoting the existing staging areas;
- **81%** strongly agree/agree we should explore the development of new staging areas;
- **77%** strongly agree/agree that education and enforcement go hand in hand;
- **56%** strongly agree/agree that OHV use in current non-designated areas should be allowed; and
- **54%** strongly disagree/disagree we should focus on public safety and take steps to curb illegal OHV activity, including fines against users.

It should be noted the survey was not intended to be statistically valid and as with any public engagement process, results tend to be weighted by participants that have an interest in a topic or issue (whether they support or oppose what is being proposed).

87%

**strongly agree/
agree we should be
concerned about
the use of additional
physical barriers due
to the impact on the
natural environment
while limiting trail/
access to nature**

88%

**agree that we should take
a holistic community-based
approach to OHV management**

89%

**agree that OHV use
should be expected
in our community**

5.2 CURRENT ENGAGEMENT

5.2.1 Stakeholder Workshop - January 2021

Due to the restrictions on group gatherings in January 2021 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, this stakeholder workshop was held virtually using the Microsoft Teams platform.

This workshop was used to help determine broad priorities and objectives for an update to the OHV Master Plan in the urban service area. Participants were encouraged to share ideas on current challenges, potential mitigation strategies, and discuss how the 2016 OHV Master Plan succeeded or where adjustments should be made. Following this online meeting, participants were invited to share further feedback by completing short online engagement activities using the online platform, *Participate Wood Buffalo*, available at rmwb.ca/ohv.

There was a diverse group of stakeholders present with persons attending on behalf of RMWB Bylaw, Alberta Snowmobile Association, McMurray Dirt Riders Association, Ride North Moto, RCMP, McMurray Sno-Drifters and Fort Mac Poker Runners (an informally organized group of OHV enthusiasts).

Important findings that were gathered as a result of this engagement include:

- there is an appetite to change the existing Bylaw that regulates OHV use within the urban service area to allow for OHV use within designated corridors;
- there is a great deal of emphasis on promoting safe and responsible use of OHVs amongst the user groups present;
- the 2016 wildfire has created challenges for OHV users due to the burnt and fallen or hazardous trees along trails requiring regular maintenance;
- the 2016 wildfire has created opportunities for OHV use in designated corridors within firebreak areas;
- the Abasand and Tower Road / Timberlea OHV Staging Areas are in need of upgrades / improvements to better suit the users;
- new OHV Staging Areas are recommended in North Parson's Creek and Saprae Creek areas;
- amenities that would make OHV Staging Areas more desirable for all users include: fire pits, trail maps, waste receptacles, washrooms, lighting (to prevent theft and vandalism; and
- priority should be given to improving maintenance practices to ensure safe trails and signage to warn riders of potentially dangerous conditions and hazards (i.e., muskeg, steep hills, sharp corners, etc.).

5.2.2 Indigenous and Rural Partner Workshop - February 2021

Due to the restrictions on group gatherings in February 2021 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, this Indigenous and rural partner workshop was held virtually using the Microsoft Teams platform.

The purpose of this workshop was to gather information on the same topics as the first stakeholder workshop, but from the perspective of Indigenous partners and rural community representatives. Following this online meeting, participants were invited to share further feedback by completing short online engagement activities using the online platform, *Participate Wood Buffalo*, available at rmwb.ca/ohv.

Representatives from Fort McMurray 468 First Nation, Fort Chipewyan Métis Association and Fort McKay Métis Nation attended to provide their unique insight into the development of the OHV Strategic Plan.

Key findings of this engagement were as follows:

- in general, most members of the Indigenous and rural communities surrounding the Urban Service Area do not use the designated staging areas, instead they leave and access trails from their own community; and
- if new OHV trails are developed, careful planning will need to be conducted to ensure they do not interfere with trapping areas.

5.2.3 Public Survey - March 2021

Following the stakeholder and partner workshops, community members were encouraged to share their thoughts about off-highway vehicles (OHVs) in Fort McMurray through an online survey. This online survey was available on the *Participate Wood Buffalo* project page, and was open for two weeks, closing on March 8, 2021. Both OHV users and non-users were encouraged to provide their feedback.

There were over 2,800 participants in the online survey during the two week period in which it was open for feedback.

The following pages include key findings of the public survey.

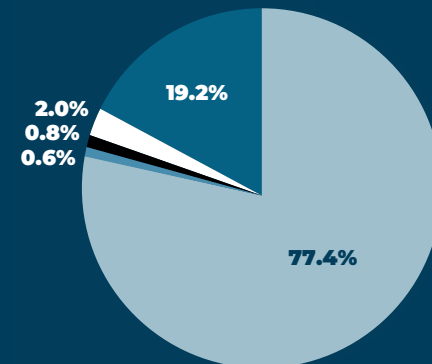
77.4%

of survey respondents are RMWB residents that are also OHV users.

What statement best describes yourself?

RMWB Resident and OHV User - 77.4%

RMWB Resident and I do not use OHVs - 19.2%
Stakeholder - 2.0%
Rights Holder - 0.6%
Other - 0.8%

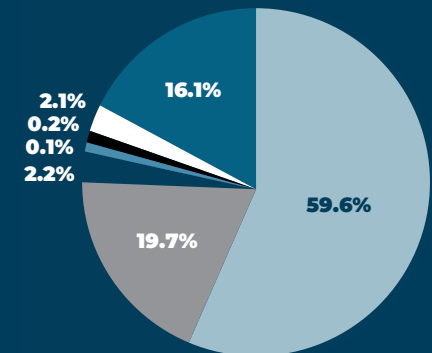


59.6%

of survey respondents are aged 30 to 44.

How old are you?

15 and Under - 0.2%
16 to 21 - 2.1%
22 to 29 - 16.1%
30 to 44 - 59.6%
45 to 59 - 19.7%
60 to 77 - 2.2%
78 and older - 0%
Prefer not to answer - 0.1%



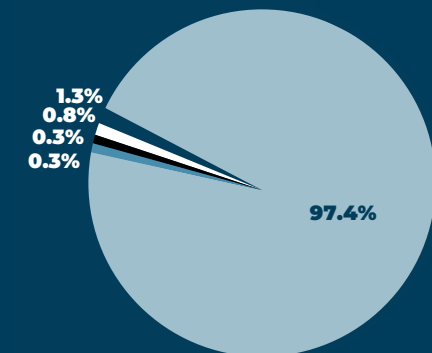
97.4%

of respondents live in Fort McMurray.

What community do you live in?

Fort McMurray - 97.4%

Anzac - 0.8%
Draper - 0.3%
Gregoire Estates - 0.3%
Saprae Creek - 1.3%



41.9%

of respondents live in the Timberlea neighbourhood.

What neighbourhood in Fort McMurray do you live in?

Abasand - 8.6%
Beacon Hill - 4.9%
Dickinsfield - 4.2%
Downtown - 2.6%
Eagle Ridge - 4.8%
Grayling Terrace - 0.7%
Gregoire - 4.7%
Longboat Landing - 0.2%

Parsons Creek - 6.3%
Prairie Creek - 1.9%
Stone Creek - 2.6%
Thickwood - 12.3%
Timberlea - 41.9%
Waterways - 0.8%
Wood Buffalo - 3.6%

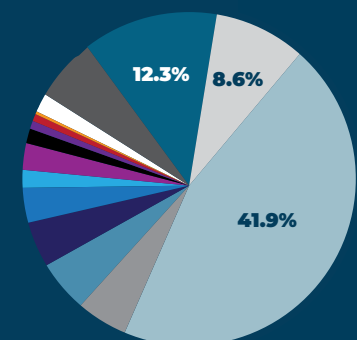


Figure 10: Survey Demographics

How often do you use OHVs within the Urban Service Area (USA) of Fort McMurray (in designated areas)?

I have never used OHVs within the USA - 16.8%
 Less than once a year - 6.6%
 Once a year - 2.2%
A few times a year - 22.0%
 Once a month - 6.2%
 Every few weeks - 19.8%
 Once a week - 16.5%
 Almost every day - 9.1%
 Daily - 1.0%

52.6%

of survey respondents use OHVs within designated areas in the Urban Service Area at least once a month.

Do you use any of the four staging areas within the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray for OHV loading / off-loading?

No - 37.6%
Yes - 62.4%

62.4%

of survey respondents use at least one of the four designated staging areas within the Urban Service Area of OHV loading / off-loading.

If OHVs were more accessible, would you try to use them or use them more often? (For example, more businesses offering short-term rentals, ride sharing programs, or tourism initiatives).

No - 10.6%
Yes - 44.7%
 I own or have regular access to OHVs already - 42.0%
 Unsure - 2.8%

44.7%

of survey respondents would try and use OHVs more, or more often, if they were more accessible to them, for example if there were more businesses offering rentals, ride sharing programs or tourism initiatives.

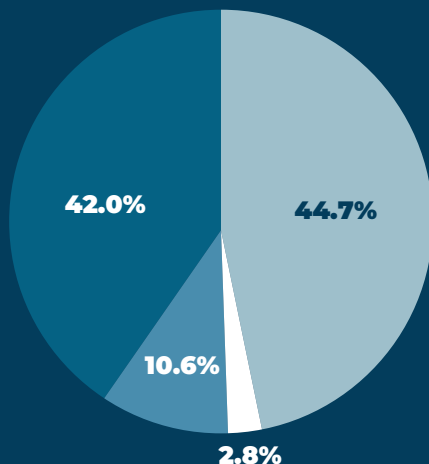
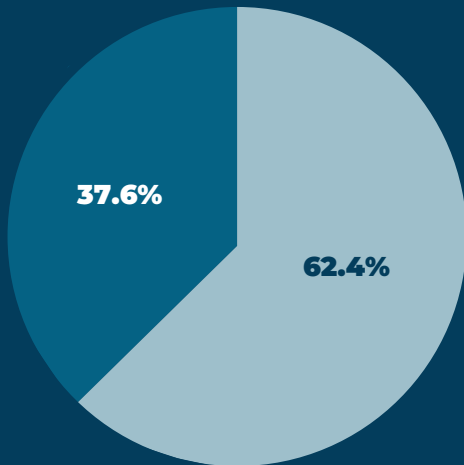
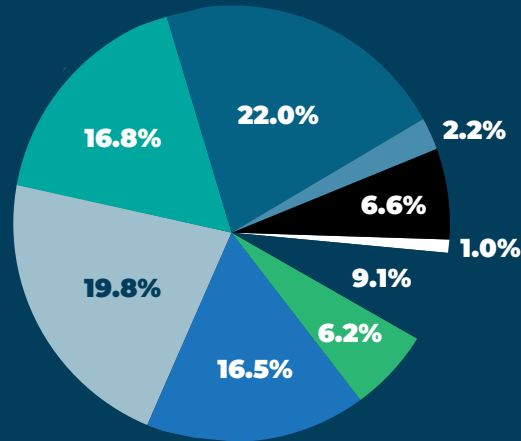
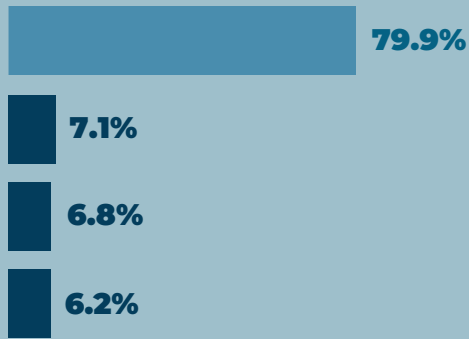


Figure 11: OHV Use

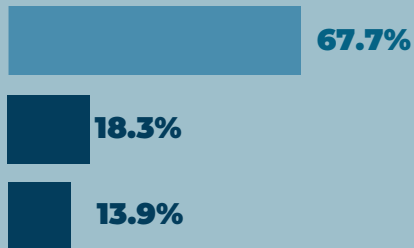


Are you bothered by the noise from OHVs?

No - 79.9%
 Yes - 7.1%
 Sometimes - 6.8%
 Only at night - 6.2%

79.9%

of survey respondents are NOT bothered by the noise from OHVs.

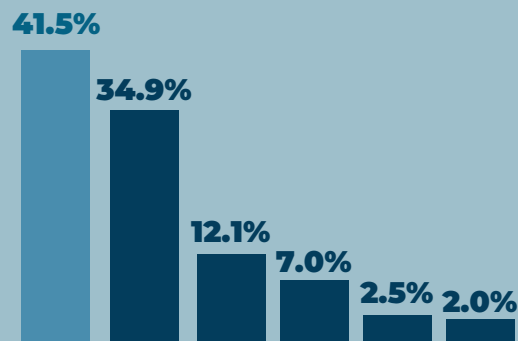


Are you bothered by the landscape damages (ruts, mud tracked, fences, barricades, etc.) from OHVs?

Yes - 13.9%
 Sometimes - 18.3%
 No - 67.7%

67.7%

of survey respondents are NOT bothered by the landscape damages / visual impediments from OHVs.



How often do you see OHVs being used dangerously or in unauthorized areas such as neighbourhood streets and designated walking trails?

Never - 34.9%
 Multiple times a day - 7.0%
 Once a day - 2.0%
 A few times a week - 12.1%
 Every now and again, but not that often - 41.5%
 Unsure - 2.5%

41.5%

of respondents say they have witnessed dangerous or unauthorized OHV use every now and again, but not that often.

Figure 12: Concerns with OHVs

ANY CONCERNS WITH OHVs?

ACCESS & IMPROVEMENTS

41.1%

of respondents feel that the Tower Road / Timberlea staging area is most in need of improvements / upgrades.

Of the four OHV staging areas, which (if any) is most in need of improvements / upgrades?

Tower Road / Timberlea - 41.1%

Abasand - 19.9%

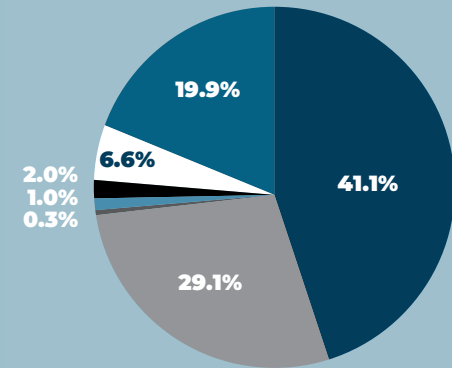
Horse Pasture Park / Waterways - 2.0%

Snye Park - 1.0%

None - 6.6%

Unsure - 29.1%

I am not an OHV user - 0.3%



59.7%

of survey respondents think there is INADEQUATE access from existing OHV staging areas and that improvements should be made.

Do you think there is adequate access to OHV trails and destinations from the existing designated OHV staging areas?

Yes, I think there is adequate access - 25.4%

No, I think there is inadequate access and improvements should be made - 59.7%

Unsure - 10.8%

I am not an OHV user - 4.0%

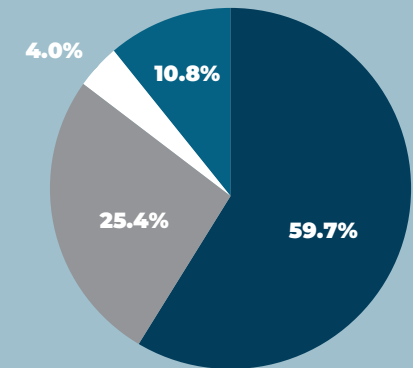


Figure 13: OHV Access & Improvements

Respondent-recommended changes to increase access to OHV trails and destinations:

- ability to leave for the trails from one's home instead of traveling to a staging area (if within a certain distance of OHV trails);
- addition of new designated staging areas to allow for a greater number of trail access points;
- creation of new OHV trails to travel between communities within the RMWB;
- better signage for trails (both trailhead maps and wayfinding along trails);
- shared use trail systems within the Urban Service Area; and
- increase the size of existing staging areas to allow greater parking capacity for parking.

63.1%

of survey respondents think there is the need for additional staging areas within the urban service area.

Respondent-recommended locations for an additional staging areas within Fort McMurray:

- Gregoire;
- Parsons Creek;
- Abasand;
- Prairie Creek;
- Wood Buffalo;
- Syncrude Athletic Park;
- Thickwood / Timberlea;
- Real Martin Drive / Little Fisheries;
- South end of Hwy 63;
- Walnut Crescent;
- Beacon Hill; and
- Every neighbourhood should have a staging area.

33.3%

of survey respondents think there should be a new staging area in Parsons Creek (this was the most common response).

Top 5 supported amenities:

1. Enlarged Parking Lot (52.6%)

2. OHV Trail Maps (45.7%)

3. OHV Off-Loading Ramp (44.5%)

4. Large Garbage Bins (43.1%)

5. Public Washrooms & Additional OHV Trails (41.1%)

Using the Abasand OHV Staging area as an example, what improvements would encourage you to use this amenity more often, including for non-OHV purposes? (more than one amenity could be selected)

Warm-Up Shack - 25.3%
Gazebo / Covered Structure - 18.0%
Fire Pit - 32.1%
Enlarged Parking Lot - 52.6%
OHV Off-Loading Ramp - 44.5%
Public Washrooms - 41.1%
Additional OHV Trails - 41.1%
OHV Trail Maps - 45.7%
Repair Stand - 0.1%
Washing Station - 32.0%
Additional Walking Trails - 16.0%
Additional Cycling Trails - 12.1%
Cycling / Pedestrian Trail Maps - 13.9%
Wayfinding Signage - 14.4%
Public Education Brochures & Notice Board - 10.1%
Picnic Tables - 22.6%
Large Garbage Bins - 43.1%
Trailer Parking - 36.7%
Lighting - 34.0%
Access Gates - 0.1%
OHV Park / Training Facility - 0.1%
I would not use the Abasand OHV Staging Area - 11.6%

ACCESS & IMPROVEMENTS

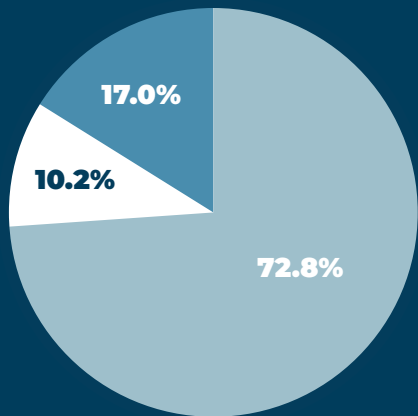


Figure 14: Level of support for current Bylaws

Do you agree with the current bylaws governing OHV use within the Urban Service Area?

Yes, I agree with the current bylaw - 10.2%
No, I think the bylaw should be changed - 72.8%
 Unsure - 17.0%

72.8%

of survey respondents think the current bylaw governing OHV use within the Urban Service Area should be changed.

Reasons why respondents support the current bylaws:

- promotes safe operation of OHVs;
- restricts the noise caused by OHVs;
- provides reasonable controls to OHV usage; and
- protects natural spaces.

Respondent-recommended changes to the current bylaw governing OHV use in the Urban Service Area:

- OHV-designated corridors to access staging areas and trails beyond the Urban Service Area from certain neighbourhoods; and
- Heavier fines / penalties for unauthorized use.

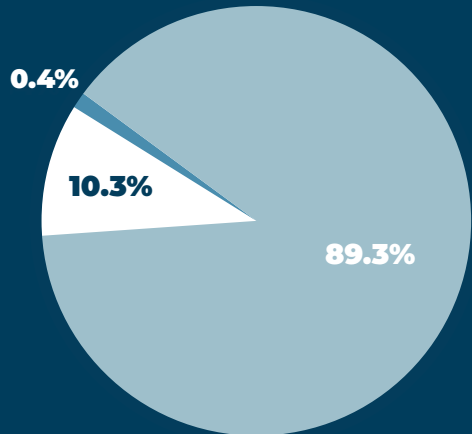


Figure 15: Support for driving OHVs from homes to trails

If there were safety parameters established, do you support residents being allowed to drive their OHV from their home to designated staging areas or trails in close proximity?

No - 10.3%
Yes - 89.3%
 Unsure - 0.4%

89.3%

of survey respondents think that residents living within a certain distance of OHV trails and staging areas should be able to leave (via OHV) from their homes.

What are key strategies needed within the OHV Strategic Plan for the Urban Service Area? (More than one strategy could be selected).

Open communication with the public to ensure everyone is informed - 68.0%

Implementing resident feedback - 53.2%

Presenting a timeline for implementing recommendations - 32.6%

Defining the boundaries of the Urban Service Area with signage (i.e. "You are now entering / leaving the Urban Service Area") - 47.7%

Engagement with partners / stakeholders / residents - 23.4%

Generating conversation regarding changing of the Bylaw to permit OHV use from residence to trail - 51.1%

Look at other communities of similar size / location as precedents to learn what works and what doesn't - 37.3%

Increased enforcement (Bylaw and RCMP) including physical presence and fines - 15.0%

Increased education on safe OHV use - 32.8%

Unsure - 4.2%

Other - 2.7%

Top 3 key strategies:

1. **Open communication with public to ensure everyone is informed (68.0%)**
2. **Implementing resident feedback (53.2%)**
3. **Generating conversation regarding changing of the Bylaw to permit OHV use from residence to trail (51.1%)**



5.3 CONTINUED PUBLIC INPUT AND ENGAGEMENT

Continued public input and engagement is a necessary component of continued Master Plan development and implementation. As noted in the results of the public survey, open and honest communication, and implementing resident feedback were the top two supported strategies for successfully implementing this Strategic Plan.

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 6.0.





6.0

RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS & PRIORITIES

Rigorous public engagement, analysis of current best practices and findings of the previous OHV Master Plan have all created the foundation on which these recommendations have been made. Below are the immediate-, near- and long-term recommendations for OHV use and programming within the Urban Service Area. Section 6.2 provides a comprehensive explanation of each recommendation.

Immediate-Term (1-3 years):

- **conduct a thorough review of existing bylaws, in particular the bylaw pertaining to OHV use within the Urban Service Area;**
- **upgrade the Abasand and Tower Road / Timberlea OHV staging areas to accommodate more parking and amenities for both OHV and non- OHV users;**
- **develop a RMWB OHV Responsible Rider Program that expands on existing and develops new initiatives that seek to educate OHV users on safe and responsible operation of OHVs and care for the natural environment;**
- **create a signage and wayfinding plan for all OHV trails, staging areas and amenities (design phase);**
- **encourage multi-use of trails, trail heads and other amenities that allow OHVs, hikers and other active transportation modes to co-exist;**
- **develop and implement a maintenance strategy for all existing and proposed OHV trails in and immediately surrounding the Urban Service Area; and**
- **develop an OHV Advisory Group to create and foster partnerships with various user groups and stakeholders as well as providing regular input on issues and opportunities as described in this Master Plan.**

Near-Term (3-5 years):

- **detail and implement FireSmart considerations for all OHV trails and corridors within and immediately surrounding the Urban Service Area;**
- **implement two new OHV staging areas within the Urban Service Area to accommodate usership and encourage access at approved points;**
- **establish a partnership with Fort McMurray Tourism / local businesses to offer rentals and tour-guiding for non-OHV users and visitors to the RMWB;**
- **implement the previously designed signage and wayfinding plan for all OHV trails, staging areas and amenities (installation / construction phase); and**
- **create a meaningful partnership with Search & Rescue that focuses on the creation of a regional-scale plan for ensuring effective incident reporting and response.**

Long-Term (5-10 years):

- **continued engagement with stakeholders, community, Indigenous and rural partners;**
- **monitoring success of implemented recommendations; and**
- **re-evaluating needs of the community as they change.**

6.2 DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

6.2.1 Immediate Term Recommendations (1-3 Years)

Conduct a thorough review of existing bylaws, in particular the bylaw pertaining to OHV use within the Urban Service Area.

For many years now, there has been an appetite from the general public, user groups and stakeholders to update the existing Bylaw pertaining to OHV use within the Urban Service Area. The results of engagement in Section 5.0 of this Strategic Plan reiterate this desire. As a direct result of this engagement, it is a recommendation of this Strategic Plan that the bylaw which governs OHV use within the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray be reviewed and updated.

The most widely supported change to the bylaw that arose out of public engagement was to permit the use of OHVs within designated corridors to permit residents living in the Urban Service Area to travel from their residence directly to a designated staging area (via OHV). The wildfires of 2016 made this all the more enticing for users because the creation of firebreaks introduced large swaths of unprogrammed greenspace connecting neighbourhoods to the larger greenbelts and natural spaces. If such a change to the bylaw were to be considered, there are a number of regulations that are recommended to be included.

It is a recommendation of this Strategic Plan that a legal review be conducted to the proposed regulations do not conflict with the *Traffic Safety Act* prior to their enactment.

- the use of OHVs along designated corridors would be permitted only for travel directly from the user's residence to a designated staging area or trail beyond the Urban Service Area;
- all laws found within the *Traffic Safety Act* regarding operation of a motor vehicle shall apply (including age of operation, obeying traffic laws, seat belts, child restraint devices, signal lights, mirrors, blood alcohol content, etc.);
- OHVs being used in these corridors must be equipped with the factory exhaust system;
- speed limit;
- hours of permitted use;
- OHVs must carry current and valid registration and insurance;
- registration numbers must be displayed (in large, predetermined size) on every OHV for identification purposes.

A change to the bylaw such as this would require an increased presence of enforcement to ensure compliance. At the present time the RMWB bylaw experiences a number of challenges regarding enforcement. These challenges include:

- safely pursuing and / or stopping offenders;
- laying charges without formal complaints / statements;
- relatively modest fines; and
- staff vacancies and a lack of resources.

If the bylaw were to be updated to allow for OHV use along designated corridors within the Urban Service Area, there are a number of enforcement tactics that are recommended to assist Bylaw Services. While the acquisition and use of this equipment will be dependent on available department funding, these tactics include:

- the display of large registration numbers on OHVs that are visible to officers without needing to pursue the offender. This would allow Bylaw and RCMP officers to mail tickets / notice of fines to OHV users after witnessing illegal or unauthorized use;
- the use of trail cameras along designated corridors to have a constant presence without needing to expend resources to have officers patrolling. This will allow for greater surveillance of trails as well as the ability to investigate offenses reported by the general public or other OHV users by looking at trail camera recordings; and
- installation of speed radar signs along designated OHV corridors. Studies have shown that when alerted by a radar sign, speeders will slow down up to 80% of the time. Typical average speed reductions are 10-20%, and overall compliance with the posted speed limit will increase by 30-60%. The simple installation of radar signs can greatly increase safety and responsible OHV use along these trails, while also giving the impression of greater enforcement presence.

Upgrade both the Abasand and Tower Road / Timberlea OHV staging areas to accommodate more parking and amenities for both OHV and non-OHV users.

The Abasand and Tower Road / Timberlea OHV Staging Areas were identified as in need of improvements to better suit users (both OHV and non-OHV) through engagement. These findings can be found in Section 5.0. Through various workshops and surveys a list of desirable amenities for these staging areas was developed. While Abasand was used as a case study to collect this information, it can be used as a design starting point for any future upgrades to staging areas. The top 10 amenities are listed below,



with the most desirable being listed first:

1. Enlarged Parking Lot
2. OHV Trail Maps
3. OHV Off-Loading Ramp
4. Large Garbage Bins
5. Public Washrooms & Additional OHV Trails
6. Trailer Parking
7. Lighting
8. Fire Pit
9. Washing Station
10. Warm-Up Shack

In order to determine the proper qualities of these amenities, such as number of parking stalls required, it is a recommendation of this Strategic Plan that a program of gathering user statistics be implemented. These statistics could be collected in a collaborative effort amongst user groups, the RMWB, future OHV Advisory group and other stakeholders. The collection of this information will ensure that expansion of parking lots, amenities offered and the design of future staging areas is better guided and does in fact suit the needs of users.

Develop a RMWB OHV Responsible Rider Program that expands on existing and develops new initiatives that seek to educate OHV users on safe and responsible operation of OHVs and care for the natural environment.

There are a number of existing programs focusing on educating riders on responsible OHV use and safety (as outlined in Section 3.5). It is a recommendation of this Strategic Plan that the RMWB, in partnership with the OHV Advisory Committee and other user groups, create an OHV Responsible Rider Program. This program would seek to educate OHV users on safe and responsible operation of OHVs and care for the natural environment. One important component of this program is to encourage membership with local OHV organizations and collaborate with these groups to prepare and distribute educational literature and testing. It is a recommendation of this plan that as a membership requirement, individuals must write a test that ensures they read the educational information. This information may contain information on:

- OHV trail etiquette and courteous use;
- how to be FireSmart when using your OHV;
- safety guidelines including proactive measures, incident reporting and response;
- care for the environment and how to minimize your impact; and

- information on upcoming safety and educational sessions being provided by the RMWB, local user groups or other third parties, such as the Canada Safety Council (CSC) ATV Rider Course.

It is a recommendation of this plan that the OHV Responsible Rider Program be created in partnership between the RMWB and local user groups. It is the hope that in future years, once the program is well established that local user groups can continue the program with support from the RMWB. However, in early years this program will need proactive support and collaboration with RMWB staff and appropriate departments.

In addition to the education and safety literature and programming, it is a recommendation of this Strategic Plan that the RMWB offer free or low-cost rental of helmets for OHV users. These helmets can be made available at one or more municipal offices, or a local business partner. These free or low-cost rentals would encourage safe OHV use by locals and tourists alike.

Create a signage and wayfinding plan for all OHV trails, staging areas and amenities (design phase).

Another key recommendation of this Strategic Plan is to create a signage and wayfinding plan for use at all OHV trails, staging areas and amenities. In the immediate term (next 1-3 years), this plan proposes that this signage and wayfinding program be designed. Types of signage that would be included in this plan are:

- Wayfinding Signage - these signs serve to provide direction to trail users. This may include sign blades at key trail intersections indicating which trails go in each direction, a sign that lets the rider know their location (coordinates) or a sign that lets riders know when they are entering or leaving the Urban Service Area, to name a few examples (Figure 16);
- Trail Maps - every trailhead should include a detailed map of trails in the area and the location of amenities such as washrooms and fire pits (Figure 17);

Figure 16: Wayfinding Signage



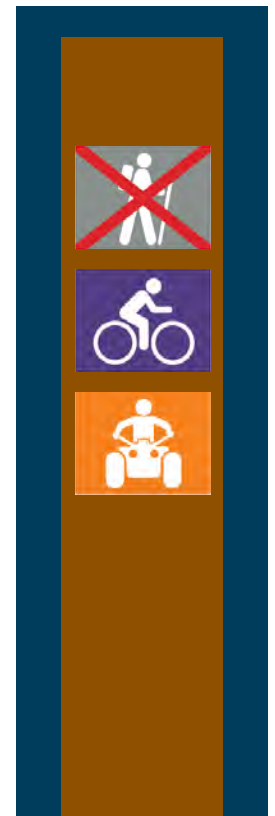
Figure 17: Trail Map



Figure 18: Difficulty Signage



Figure 19: Regulatory Signage



- Trail Difficulty - these signs serve to communicate the level of difficulty users can expect to face on any given trail. Standard trail classification systems for grading difficulty shall be implemented (Figure 18);
- Regulatory Signage - these signs serve to inform users of the rules and regulations in place that they must abide by. These signs may include posted speed limits, permitted uses, prohibited actions, hours of permitted use, etc (Figure 19).
- Facility Signage - this signage serve to identify important areas within the OHV system. This may include signage indicating OHV Staging Areas, such as the "Tower Road / Timberlea OHV Staging Area;"
- Warning / Hazard Signage - these signs serve to warn OHV users of hazardous conditions such as sharp turns, steep slopes, seasonal flooding, erosion, fallen trees, or any other hazard whether it be temporary or permanent;
- Educational Signage - these signs serve the purpose of educating riders while enjoying the trails and other OHV amenities. Examples of educational signage include "how to be FireSmart while operating your

OHV" and "why you should stay on the designated trails." When you take the time to educate someone on the reasoning behind regulations, they are much more inclined to abide by them (Figure 20).

- Interpretive Signage - these signs serve to inform OHV users of the historical, cultural or environmental significance of an area. Whether this be the presence of traditional traplines, or the presence of an endangered species, these signs serve to educate users on the significance of an area in order to foster a greater respect for the place (Figure 21).

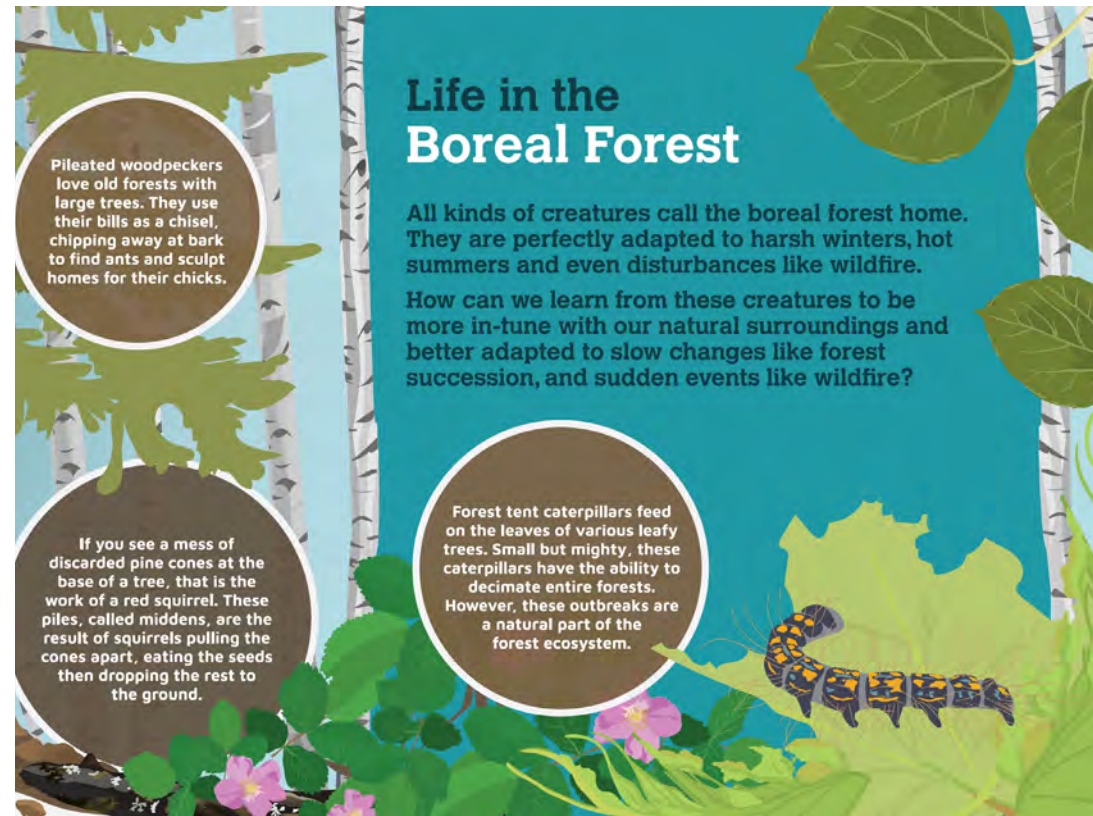
Encourage multi-use of trails, trail heads and other amenities that allow OHVs, hikers and other active transportation modes to co-exist.

Equal opportunity and access to recreation is an important objective, not only within the RMWB, but across the entire country. Therefore, it is a recommendation of this Strategic Plan to develop design parameters

Figure 20: Educational Signage



Figure 21: Interpretive Signage



and strategies to encourage the multi-use of trails, trail heads and other amenities that allow OHVs, hikers and other active transportation modes to co-exist while maintaining both actual and perceived safety of all trail users. Some features that will encourage multi-use of trails, trail heads and other amenities include:

- trails that are wide enough to accommodate two OHVs passing one another. This width of trail would need to be approximately 4.0m. Not only would this width allow the passing of two OHVs, but it would then also allow pedestrians and cyclists to use these trails without feeling unsafe;
- multi-use trails should have lower posted speed limits for OHVs to ensure safety and comfort of other trail users;
- trail heads should include amenities for all users including bike repair stands, wash stations, fire pits, washrooms, waste receptacles, etc.;
- multi-use trails should include regulatory signage that denotes which trail user has the right-of-way on that specific trail; and
- dogs must be kept on leash at all times when on multi-use trails to reduce the chance of conflict with cyclists and / or OHVs.

While it is a key recommendation of this plan to encourage multi-use trails, trail heads and amenities, it is also important to consider the value in providing specific-use trails. For example, it is crucial to designate trails that are for non-motorized uses only so that human-nature experiences are preserved.

Develop and implement a maintenance strategy for all existing and proposed OHV trails in and immediately surrounding the Urban Service Area.

An important finding of the engagement conducted when preparing this Strategic Plan was that there needs to be a maintenance strategy in place for the existing OHV trails before any new ones should be considered. As a result of the 2016 wildfires, a great number of trees were felled, or remain standing but are extremely hazardous. OHV users report a large number of trees falling after every wind event that then require a great deal of maintenance to make the trails passable again. Figure 22 shows an example of trails following a wind event, but before any maintenance and clearing occurs, and an example of a Sno-Drifter maintained trail after countless volunteer hours were spent on clearing fallen trees. Not only did the 2016 wildfires leave a number of downed and hazardous trees, but the reduction in forest cover has also significantly increased erosion causing further trail upkeep concerns.

Figure 22: Example of trails following a wind event, before any maintenance, and after Sno-Drifters have maintained the trail



Before Maintenance

Photo courtesy of McMurray Sno-Drifters



After Maintenance

Photo courtesy of McMurray Sno-Drifters

Maintenance is an essential component of any trail program, whether it be for hiking, cycling or OHV. That is why it is a recommendation of this Strategic Plan that a comprehensive maintenance strategy be created and implemented to ensure the existing OHV trails in and around the Urban Service Area be brought up to standard, and maintained regularly before any new trails are considered. Recommended maintenance practices include:

- removal of fallen trees and / or debris that blocks trails (this will need to be monitored, especially following a storm event);
- removal of hazardous trees that prevent a risk to nearby trails. This would include any snags (dead trees that are still standing), diseased trees or structurally compromised trees that may fall onto the trails in future wind events. This is a proactive measure aimed at reducing future maintenance required for clearing trees that have fallen onto the trails;
- regular monitoring of trails to ensure safe riding conditions and the identification of any maintenance needed or temporary hazard signage that should be posted; and
- monitoring areas susceptible to erosion and implementing techniques to mitigate so they require less maintenance in the future. For example, installing water bars and / or culverts along trails where washouts frequently occur can serve to channel water to prevent erosion that requires frequent maintenance.

The RMWB will need to rely heavily on trail users and the OHV Advisory group to report any issues requiring attention. In addition to user reporting, the trail cameras that were recommended as an enforcement aid would also assist in general monitoring of the trails for maintenance purposes.

In order to make such rigorous maintenance practices realistic within the RMWB, it is recommended that trail fees be instated. 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. Alberta Environment and Parks 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 Strategic Plan is to direct legitimate users towards legitimate trail facilities (ex. to designated staging areas), a

more suitable approach may be to suggest a donation amount with a clear understanding that any donations will be applied towards trail maintenance.

Develop an OHV Advisory group to create and foster partnerships with various user groups and stakeholders as well as providing regular input on issues and opportunities as described in this Strategic Plan.

It is a recommendation of this Strategic Plan that an OHV Advisory Group be established. The purpose of this group would be to create and foster partnerships with various user groups and stakeholders as well as providing regular input on issues and opportunities as described in this plan.

An OHV advisory group may be initially established by the RMWB. At this early stage, the group may initiate activities such as the hosting of local events, the delivery of communications and educational 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 Strategic 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 Downtown Revitalization Advisory Committee (WBDRAC). In this instance, a largely autonomous group, created by Regional Council, advises and makes recommendations to Council on downtown revitalization. Although various municipal departments undertake their own initiatives complementary to the goals of the Committee, the overall strategic direction for the WBDRAC program is determined and /or coordinated at the Committee level, on which the 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. The membership of the WBDRAC includes:

- 1 Council Member appointed as a non-voting liaison;
- 1 Land Development Industry representative;
- 2 Business Community representatives;
- 1 Education representative;
- 1 Oil and Gas Industry representative;



- 1 Indigenous Representative;
- 1 Arts, Culture & Heritage representative;
- 1 Recreation representative;
- 1 Seniors representative;
- 1 Community Development Sector representative;
- 1 Safety and Security Sector representative; and
- 1 Public-at-Large representative.

At the outset, the OHV Advisory 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 Strategic Plan (i.e. 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 (i.e. trail maintenance, trail use, enforcement, community, planning);
- focus specific attention on integrating communications, educational and safety programming and strategic / corporate partnership development (i.e. to coordinate development of trails and amenities);
- foster relationships with local user groups to develop strong partnerships regarding common goals; and
- make a special effort to engage Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) in the establishment of, and ongoing participation in, this group. As the manager of public lands, with the legislative tools to manage trails, AEP can make a significant contribution to implementation of this OHV Strategic Plan.

It is absolutely critical that this Strategic Plan undergoes regular review to ensure its vision, goals and objectives remain relevant to OHV users, key stakeholders and the public in the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray. In this sense, the Strategic Plan must be considered as a living document by the RMWB, with mechanisms in place to solicit regular feedback. The OHV advisory group will play a key role in ensuring the timely and meaningful review of the Strategic Plan.

6.2.2 Near Term Recommendations (3-5 Years)

Detail and implement FireSmart considerations for all OHV trails and corridors within and immediately surrounding the Urban Service Area.

The FireSmart initiative is all about appropriately managing wildfires. This

requires balancing the natural role of fire with the protection of human life, property and economic values. With Fort McMurray being a FireSmart community that continues to implement its principles and practices, it only seems natural to extend this to OHV use. It is an important recommendation of this Strategic Plan that FireSmart considerations for all OHV trails and corridors within and immediately surrounding the Urban Service Area be detailed and implemented.

According to Alberta Wildfire, OHVs can start wildfires:

- OHV exhaust systems can reach temperatures in excess of 204 degrees Celsius, which is more than enough start a wildfire;
- with the exhaust system reaching such high temperatures, any built up debris on an OHV (such as grass or muskeg) can ignite and start a wildfire; and
- any smoldering debris on an OHV can drop onto the ground while moving and start a wildfire.

FireSmart considerations for OHV users, as per Alberta Wildfire:

- before you ride, clean out hot spots and remove debris from your machine;
- after riding through muskeg or tall grass, stop and remove any build-up from your machine;
- carry firefighting equipment such as a small shovel, collapsible pail or fire extinguisher;
- wash your OHV and keep it clean (but do not wash in streams and creeks);
- make sure your muffler and spark arrestor are working properly; and
- stop frequently. Take the time to knock debris from your machine's hot spots. If the debris is smoldering, soak it, stir it, and soak it again to make sure it's out.

FireSmart considerations for OHV amenity creation and maintenance:

- vegetation management (as per the FireSmart disciplines) should be conducted along all OHV trails to help reduce wildfire fuels in areas where OHVs are used;
- fuel removal (removal of flammable vegetation) should be conducted within 5.0m of OHV trails and staging areas where these assets are in close proximity to infrastructure and residential neighbourhoods;
- fuel reduction (flammable vegetation is lessened through pruning, thinning, mowing, mulching, etc.) should be conducted within 5.0m along both sides of every OHV trail;

- species conversion (removal of flammable species and replacement with less flammable species) should be conducted whenever feasible when trails and amenities are being constructed or updated; and
- any proposed plantings along trails or around OHV amenities shall be low-combustibility (i.e. deciduous trees, not coniferous).

Implement two new OHV staging areas within the Urban Service Area to accommodate usership and encourage access at approved points.

This Strategic Plan recommends the addition of two new OHV staging areas within the Urban Service Area (USA) to accommodate usership and encourage access at approved points. The locations, as determined through community engagement, are at the north end of the USA in Parsons Creek and at the south end of the USA on the west side of Highway 63. Both of these locations were determined by the general public as ideal location for staging and access to existing OHV trails and amenities. 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:

- 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; and
- recreational amenities – day use amenities which complement trail use can include picnic areas / shelters and modern washrooms. Other convenience features should include garbage and recycling facilities.

As noted earlier, various workshops and surveys were conducted in preparation of this Strategic Plan, and from them, a list of desirable amenities for staging areas was developed. The top 10 amenities are listed below, with the most desirable being listed first:

1. Large Parking Lot
2. OHV Trail Maps
3. OHV Off-Loading Ramp
4. Large Garbage Bins
5. Public Washrooms & Additional OHV Trails
6. Trailer Parking
7. Lighting
8. Fire Pit
9. Washing Station
10. Warm-Up Shack



In order to determine the proper qualities of these amenities, such as number of parking stalls required, it is a recommendation of this Strategic Plan that a program of gathering user statistics be implemented. These statistics could be collected in a collaborative effort amongst user groups, the RMWB, future OHV Advisory group and other stakeholders. The collection of this information will ensure that the design of future staging areas is better guided and does in fact suit the needs of users.

Establish a partnership with Fort McMurray Tourism / local businesses to offer rentals and tour-guiding for non-OHV users and visitors to the RMWB.

A key finding of the engagement program for this report was that 59.8% of non-OHV users, would try OHVs if they were made more accessible (i.e. if more businesses offered short-term rentals, ride sharing programs or tourism initiatives).

During the stakeholder workshop, users identified the potential for the RMWB trail network to become a tourism attraction and new economic driver. In order for this to be realized, better access into and out of the Urban Service Area via OHV needs to be implemented. In addition to this, a partnership with Fort McMurray Tourism will need to be fostered to advertise trails and amenities that will draw OHV enthusiasts to the region. Another key component of developing an OHV tourist attraction is working with local businesses to offer OHV rentals and tour-guiding for non-OHV users and visitors to the RMWB.

The establishment of these partnerships in order to increase the OHV tourism potential of the RMWB is a recommendation of this Strategic Plan. In the long term, additional revenue generated from tourism could be reinvested into improving and expanding the existing network of trails and OHV amenities.

Implement the previously designed signage and wayfinding plan for all OHV trails, staging areas and amenities (installation / construction phase).

While an immediate term recommendation (1-3 years) was to design / create a signage and wayfinding plan for OHV trails and amenities, the near term objective (3-5 years) is to physically implement the signage plan and install the various types of signage. To reiterate, the types of signage to be installed include wayfinding signage, trail maps, trail difficulty signage, regulatory signage, facility signage, warning / hazard signage, educational signage and interpretive signage. Detailed explanations of these signage types can be found in section 6.2.1.





Photo courtesy of Dennis Norman

Consultation with OHV users, stakeholders and the OHV advisory committee will be an important step in the successful creation and implementation of this plan. It is also recommended that partnerships with these groups be explored for the installation, monitoring and maintenance of these signs.

Create a meaningful partnership with Search & Rescue that focuses on the creation of a regional-scale plan for ensuring effective incident reporting and response.

Fort McMurray Search and Rescue (SAR) is a trained volunteer organization that assists the local RCMP and / or Emergency Services with the ground search and rescue operations in the RMWB. They are equipped to search via foot, ATV, snowmobiles, helicopters, boats and more. Their unique and diverse skill set and search methods allow them to play a particularly important role in incident response for OHVs, as they often occur in locations that are inaccessible via ambulance or other traditional methods.

It is a recommendation of this Strategic Plan that the RMWB foster a meaningful partnership with Fort McMurray Search and Rescue for the

purpose of creating a regional-scale plan that focuses on effective incident reporting and response. Whether it is Fort McMurray SAR or another wilderness rescue agency (such as STARS) responding to a remote OHV incident, Fort McMurray SAR will be able to provide a unique insight and perspective into the development of this plan.

Objectives of this incident response plan include:

- ensuring first responders can locate OHV incidents so they can respond appropriately;
- educating OHV users in the importance of knowing basic wilderness first aid;
- educating OHV users in effective methods for reporting incidents and calling for help; and
- design considerations for incident response such as ensuring adequate landing zones for air ambulances (helicopters) to land.

As consultation with Fort McMurray SAR is undertaken, these objectives may change and evolve based on their expertise and guidance.

6.2.3 Long Term Recommendations (5-10 Years)

Continued engagement with stakeholders, community, and Indigenous and rural partners.

A key component to the success of this Strategic Plan is continued engagement with stakeholders, the general public and Indigenous and rural partners. The public survey conducted in March 2021 revealed that the top two most supported strategies for the successful implementation of this Strategic Plan were:

- open communication with the public to ensure everyone is informed (68.0% support); and
- implementing resident feedback (53.2% support).

It is a recommendation of this plan that the RMWB continuously engage with and inform residents of any changes, upgrades and discussions regarding OHV use within the urban service area. Open communication with the public is essential when proposing and implementing changes regarding OHV use within the Urban Service Area. This communication allows for feedback and keeps residents apprised of changes that may be coming. This will foster a greater level of community support as recommendations are implemented.

The recommendations of this Strategic Plan have been formulated directly from the findings of the public engagement that was conducted over the past 10+ years. As these recommendations are implemented, it is important to keep the community apprised. By showing residents that their feedback and ideas are being realized, it will encourage greater levels of participation in engagement activities in the future.

Monitoring the success of implemented recommendations.

As recommendations of this Strategic Plan are being realized and implemented, it is important to monitor their success. For example, after the Abasand OHV Staging Area is upgraded, it should be monitored to gauge its level of success so that modifications can be made as needed prior to upgrading the Timberlea / Tower Road OHV Staging Area. Some of these assessment questions may include:

- are residents using the newly upgraded OHV Staging Area;
- what amenities are being utilized to their full potential;
- what amenities are not being utilized as much as was anticipated;
- are residents happy with the upgrades;
- have there been any complaints since the staging area was upgraded;

- has unauthorized OHV use increased, decreased, or stayed the same in the area since the staging area was upgraded;
- has Bylaw / RCMP identified any new successes or challenges that have resulted from the upgrading of the staging area; and
- are the number of standard and trailer parking stalls provided sufficient.

These questions are a few examples that can help to gauge the success of implemented recommendations. While it is important to acknowledge that every implementation requires monitoring to gauge success, it is equally as important to recognize that each recommendation will require a different monitoring strategy. In some cases, engagement with the public will be required. In other cases, an internal review may be more appropriate.

It is a recommendation of this Strategic Plan that appropriate monitoring strategies be developed for each recommendation as it is being implemented.

Re-evaluating needs of the community as they change.

Communities are constantly changing. The Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray is certainly no exception to this. Demographically speaking, the make-up of the Urban Service Area is always evolving and along with it, the needs of the community. For example, as a community ages, its priorities change. It is important to continuously engage with the public to ensure that the objectives and recommendations of this Strategic Plan are still in fact a reflection of their needs and desires.

At the same time, the landscape is also in constant flux. This Strategic Plan was prepared in direct response to the 2016 wildfires that ravaged the area. The wildfires greatly altered the landscape of the Urban Service Area and rendered the 2016 OHV Master Plan out-of-date. Wildfires, landslides and other bio-physical changes to the landscape can greatly influence OHV use and in turn, the recommendations of this Strategic Plan.

Therefore, it is a recommendation of this Strategic Plan that the needs of the community constantly be re-evaluated to ensure that the recommendations noted are still relevant and that the priority weighting and order of implementation has not changed. It is recommended that this review include both internal discussions and engagement with the public.



A

APPENDIX: BEST BRRACTICE REVIEW

Appendix A: Best Practice Review

	Municipality	Contact Person	OHV Bylaw?	Allow OHVs on Streets	Notes
1	Parkland County	Dave Cross	Yes	Yes	OHVs are allowed on all subdivision and County roads, providing that the driver has a Class 5 license (or higher), the vehicle is registered, insured and showing a license plate. Helmets are required, unless the vehicle has a roll cage (ie. side by side). If a subdivision get majority signatures, then OHVs can be declared prohibited (there are three in the entire County so far). No concerns in hamlets with damages, and only a handful of complaints each year about OHVs and is mostly just trespass of people crossing land to get to key areas - hot spot in Graminina area for people getting down to the North Saskatchewan River. Preference that OHVs travel in ditches, but still allowed to travel on roads as long as they follow rules.
2	Town of Gibbons	Mike Dubreil	No	No	Stick with Provincial regulations. Have similar issues with OHVs. Enforcement is extremely difficult. On some trails have tried lockable swing gates to allow pedestrians but not OHVs. In many instances used winches to rip them open. Have contemplated making the community golf cart friendly, but not OHVs. Rare occasion have people with their own quad, ie. snow clearing. RCMP and bylaw only involved if a report is made. Turn a blind eye to it. A lot of damage in trails, constantly fixing these areas. Memorial Park design - came up with Council this morning, a concern with OHVs accessing the park. The odd occasion say a snowmobile is seen at the toboggan hill.
3	City of Flin Flon	Lindsay Cheran	Yes	Yes	OHVs are permitted in designated corridors throughout the City that allows passage from homes to areas outside the City limits. Routes are signed so that they are clearly identified. Hours are 0700h to 2300h. A lot of respect by users, and little to no damages caused in the City and no concern with trespassing.
4	City of Prince George	Laurie Kosec	No	No	No real concerns with OHVs, and no demand from local residents to create a bylaw to allow OHVs on public streets. The Parks and Open Space bylaw is the only device that controls OHVs, and just says that vehicles are not permitted on any land other than roads and parking lots. No enforcement concerns in the City, very little trespass or damage caused by OHVs in the City
5	Town of Whitecourt	Doug Timchyshe	Yes	Yes	OHVs are prohibited between April 1 and November 30th, but during winter months are allowed on public streets. Prohibited from 2200-0700h. Must be 14 years old or more, if under 16 must have an adult "nearby". Can drive in any public area except parks, school property, or within 100m of three seniors homes in Town. Max 20kmh when driving on any highway or certain designated streets.

6	City of Fort St. John	Renee Jamurat	No	No	OHVs has never been a concern in the City, and no pressure from residents to create a bylaw or to use OHVs on City streets. There is surprisingly little to no OHVs on streets, no damages caused and very seldom are there any bylaw complaints around OHVs. No formal staging areas around town - plenty of areas surrounding the City to go to public lands with OHVs. Entirely prohibited on Provincial highways going thru town (ie. Hwy 43). Generally low amounts of damage. Bylaw complaints are usually around the noise of revving engines
7	City of Grande Prairie	Chris Manuel	No	No	No specific bylaw for OHVs, rather it falls under the "Traffic Bylaw". OHVs are only permitted on one's own land, and if used elsewhere requires written consent from the City. OHV use is not a big concern in the City, and there has been no real demand from user groups or residents to open the conversation regarding OHVs being permitted in the City. No real concern with damage to City property by OHVs. City does use OHVs for parks maintenance but general public in no circumstance may use them even for property maintenance.
8	Town of Slave Lake	Garry Roth	No	No	Follow Provincial laws only, no local bylaw. Council has concerns with liability and has chosen to not create a specific bylaw so they are not taking on liability.. Challenge to enforce them, hard to catch OHVs. Some hot spots where bollards have been installed to reduce trespass, but no real problems. For the most part, only bylaw complaints are focussed on trespass. Redid their traffic bylaw about a year ago and got direction to not address OHVs specifically, but to just refer to provincial rules.
9	MD of Greenview	Kevin Gramm	No	No	Many communities have strong OHV use, and there is an "unwritten rule" that you can travel from your property to surrounding open space outside of the Towns and Hamlets. Many communities such as Grande Cache have back lanes which have become the OHV corridors for leaving your property to get outside of Town. No real hot spots of concern with damages, but there is strong enforcement by bylaw officers to keep OHVs off school and park property. No recollection of any pressure from residents to create an OHV specific bylaw as the use of OHVs are generally permitted anywhere off Town and Hamlet streets and prohibited in parks and school yards. Bylaw officers are just being sticky on helmets, especially since the Province created that legislation in 2018.
10	City of Fort Saskatchewan	Coreen Rayner	No	No	No specific bylaw, rely on the Provincial rules around OHVs. Has been no demand by the public to ever create an OHV bylaw to allow use in the City. Some concerns at North Saskatchewan River boat launches with OHVs in the areas, but no real damages caused. Very little bylaw complaints around OHV use in the City.