

Dear GWTA members and area residents,

In 1995 I was asked to participate in submitting a joint application to obtain the lease on the Back 40. Pat Kingston represented the SVW, and I represented the MD. Administrators, Sharon Plett and Emily Smith, submitted the application to the Government and later that year our communities successfully obtained a 21-year lease for the Back 40.

As part of that lease agreement, we were required to establish a committee (Pat Kingston, Shiela Haasen, Gord Matthews, Ken Harvey, Dave MacDonald, and myself) to address how the lease would be enjoyed while trying to maintain the natural setting. We envisioned how “local residents” would use the Lease.

Our first obligation was to draft policies and procedures which eventually led to the first Resource Management Plan (RMP) in 1998. We planned for trail upgrades/creation, installment of benches, and woodlot management.

The uses we enjoy today were the same then, but locals could also access the Lease with their horses. ATV/Snowmobile use was limited to the Eau Claire Trail and Seismic Trail (Cut Line Trail). Dogs had to be in line-of-sight and under control of their owners; dogs were supposed to be on leash when next to private land. Trail access was always dependant on the condition of the trails. Really, hunting was the only activity that was not permitted.

As time passed, we saw activities become restricted. Equestrian use was abolished, dogs had to be leashed, and people were encouraged to get their firewood from the northwest corner of the Lease. One thing that has not changed is the trails, they remain an amazing escape for those that get out and enjoy them.

Since 2017, the appearance of the Lease has changed considerably due to the implementation of the FireSmart program. Many of the trees were removed, and the understory was mulched to mitigate the threat of wildfire to the communities. As part of the community consultation, buffer zones of original forest were left along the trails to enhance the experience of walking in a forest, and to provide shelter and safety for wildlife. Consequently, woodlot management on the Lease has changed due to the program.

Our current RMP (<https://www.mdbighorn.ca/DocumentCenter/View/87/Ghost-Waiparous-Trails-System-Resource-Management-Plan-November-2016-PDF?bidId=>) expires this fall and an updated Plan has been drafted. The Plan has been reviewed and amended as necessary by administrators at the SVW, the MD, and Alberta Environment and Parks. I encourage you to read the updated document and to provide feedback to the GWTA, the SVW, and the MD. Please contact the GWTA at gwta.ab.ca@gmail.com for an electronic copy and to seek any clarification to questions you might have. We will be seeking approval of the draft document at the next GWTA annual general meeting. If you place the documents side-by-side, there have been few changes; the major changes include:

- The RMP was previously subject to a detailed review every five years. Starting in 2021, future reviews will be triggered by request by any of the Leaseholders;
- Sections 4 Forest Protection and 5 Woodlot Management were combined into one section;
- A section introducing a Memorial Forest was added; and
- **WHEN PERMITTED** - Vehicle and OHV use was expanded and explained:
 - Vehicle use is permitted along the Eau Claire, Cut Line, and the west fire break; and

- OHV use is permitted along the Eau Claire, Cut Line, the west fire break, and the Boundary Trail.

Firewood Cutting/Collection in the Lease has seen the biggest change due to the FireSmart program. The last 2 years the GWTA Board was directed by the Leaseholder to physically control vehicle access to the Back 40. Historically people were directed to the NW corner of the Lease to harvest firewood. In the future, the GWTA will take an active role in directing where firewood will be cut/collected. Access to the lease with vehicles and OHVs will only be permitted approximately 20-25 days per year unless additional days will be granted by the Government.

The Lease is a unique area in the Province, and we are extremely fortunate to have and enjoy it. Please renew your membership, or consider joining the GWTA, and help steward the Back 40 for years to come. Memberships are \$10 for an individual or \$20 for a family. Payment can be made by mailing a cheque to:

Ghost Waiparous Trails Association
PO Box 533, Stn Main
Cochrane, AB T4C 1A7

or e-Transfer payment through your financial institution to gwta.ab.ca@gmail.com

Kindest regards,

Rick Tuza
Chairman, GWTA