

Topic: Range Road 23 Gravel Pit

Introduction:

The former gravel pit located at the end of Range Road 23 has been used as an undeveloped recreational area by County residents, as well as visitors from other municipalities. Issues have arisen around some of the different types of uses occurring in this area and direction is being sought on how best to address these issues.

Facts (Background Information):

The County leased the area from the Province back in the mid 1980's for the purposes of gravel extraction. Upon completion of the gravel extraction the area was to be reclaimed back to its natural state. Some reclamation work was carried out, but the work has not been completed. Its current state has been found by residents and visitors to the County to have significant recreational value. Activities include boating access to the river, camping, fishing, quadding/dirt biking, shooting; as well as large group gatherings. Concerns have been raised by some area residents with regards to use of the pit area. Concerns identified include fire risk from campers and parties, the large bush parties which have occurred on the site, illegal drinking and drug activity, damage to the area by quads and 4 X 4's, users of the area cutting down trees for firewood, noise generated by the parties as well as safety concerns and noise generated from the shooting that occurs in the area.

In response to the concerns raised the County has undertaken a number of activities to determine community direction and sentiment with regards to the area in the hopes of determining a future direction for the area that best serves all County residents. These activities include the following:

- September 15, 2008 Public Meeting at Hansen's Corner Hall with 21 residents in attendance. Purpose to discuss site issues and potential solutions to these issues. Prioritization exercise conducted with the attendees identified road closure as the preferred solution by a substantial margin with a scoring of 23 points, the next potential solution was to lease crown land scored at 5 points.
- November 4, 2008 Administration Report on meeting to GPC. GPC made a revision, via motion 08-116, to solutions to include taking out the roadway as a potential option. Matter referred to November 25, 2008 Council Meeting for consideration and decision.
- November 25, 2008 Council, via resolution 449-08, tabled the matter pending further discussion.
- December 2, 2008 Letter dated December 2, 2008 received, signed by 33 residents, asking Council to keep the access to the area open. Council, via resolution GPC 08-131, directed Administration to hold another public meeting to try and get more clarity on issues and solutions.

March 12, 2009	Letter dated March 12, 2009 delivered by area residents, with 110 signatures, to Council outlining their concerns regarding access to the area and asking Council to address them.
April 8, 2009	Public Meeting at Hansen's Corner Hall with 55 residents in attendance. Site issues and solutions discussed, no further clarification, no consensus reached on approach to take. Question asked regarding access to area, 22 respondents selected options relating to no access, 15 selected options relating to maintaining access.
April 21, 2009	Administration report on meeting to GPC. Motion 09-68 made to recommend to Council that the site remain accessible by vehicle with focused enforcement at specific times of the year.
May 12, 2009	Council, via resolution 141-09, directed the area to remain accessible by vehicle with increased enforcement at specific times of the year.
October 11, 2011	Council, via resolution 325-11, directed administration to develop a concept plan for developing the site into a Day Use Park area.
November 15, 2011	Letter dated November 15, 2011 delivered by Range Road 23 – Residents Group, with 14 signatures to Council reiterating concerns regarding use of the RR23 Pit area.
January 2012	Public survey began for the purposes of developing the Day Use Park plan for the area.
January 17, 2012	Range Road 23 Residents Group presented issues identified in their November 15, 2011 petition to the Governance and Priorities Committee for their information.
February 21, 2012	Governance and Priorities Committee defeated a motion to abandon, reclaim and barricade the RR23 Gravel Pit access road. Administration was directed to complete the planning process for potential Day Use Park site development and present options back to Council in May for further discussion.
April 4/5, 2012	Parkland County installs a barricade to restrict access into the RR23 Pit area.
April 17, 2012	Open House held at Hansen's Corner Hall to share draft RR23 Pit Day Use Park Concept Plan with area residents. Open House attended by 55 people. All information was made available on line as well. 41 feedback forms completed. Question asked if they support the plan. 19 support plan, 21 do not, one did not respond; of those respondents from Division Four and Five 10 supported the plan, 20 did not and one did not respond.

Analysis:

Parkland County has been seeking resolution to the issues surrounding RR23 Gravel Pit for almost four years. Recognizing that access to the North Saskatchewan River is very limited within Parkland County; and that many residents and visitors to the County enjoy this area and the many positive outdoor recreation opportunities it has to offer the decision was made to keep the area accessible with enhanced enforcement during certain times of year to try and control the negative uses occurring. Unfortunately, the issues raised by concerned residents have not subsided with this approach.

There are presently two schools of thought with regards to how these issues should be addressed. One is to pursue development of a formal Day Use Park site focusing on drawing in positive, appropriate use of the area to drive out the negative activities occurring in the area. The other is to abandon and reclaim the area back to its original state, thus removing vehicular access to the area making it less desirable to users, resulting in them seeking other locations for their activities. Several surveys and meetings have been held and there has been no clear consensus amongst the community with regards to which school of thought to pursue. It should be noted that the surveys we have conducted are not statistically relevant, but have been used to try and obtain a sense of direction from those concerned residents participating in the process.

Day Use Park Site Development

The area would be developed to accommodate and support many of the acceptable activities already occurring in the area. Activities that would be supported include picnicking, boating access, hiking, cross country skiing, fishing, swimming to name a few. Washrooms, garbage receptacles and appropriate regulatory signage would also be provided. The Day Use area would be fenced in to restrict vehicle access to that area only keeping vehicles away from the river; other than in the boat launch area. Lines of boulders are proposed for the boat launch area to contain vehicles in that area and restrict them from accessing up or down the river bank. Road improvements would also be carried out to make the access road safer; and winter access would be limited due to the steepness and dangers caused by snow and ice cover. Winter access would be addressed by an upper parking lot developed to provide residents a spot to park while they access the site on foot. In regards to management and operation of the area this would be handled by the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department who would maintain the site. The Parks Bylaw would provide additional controls for the area by setting what types of activities and use are allowed, park hours etc. Under the terms of our Parks Bylaw activities such as camping, shooting, alcohol consumption or large group gatherings after hours are not permitted. Off highway Vehicle use can also be restricted. It should be noted that since this is crown land a Recreational Lease will be required by the County to allow for this development. The County will work closely with area residents to ensure they are involved and have input into the plans for the area.

Capital Development Cost: \$442,000

*Annual Operating Costs: \$30,000-\$35,000

* - Does not include enforcement costs, only maintenance costs

Funding Source: Restricted Surplus – Municipal Park

Timing: 2012/2013

Pros:

- Chickakoo Lake Recreation Area is a County example of good use driving out bad use. This site is heavily used for the appropriate activities it was designed for resulting in the County having very few issues with the site.
- Ability of the County to better control and manage the area under the terms of our Parks Bylaw
- County residents have access to the River
- Numerous health benefits related to the recreational activities the area supports and encourages

Cons:

- Capital and Operating costs
- Negative activities may still occur, focused, consistent enforcement required to manage the area

Road Removal and Reclamation of the Site

This would involve removing the road and completing the reclamation activities as identified in the agreements with the Province. The area would be turned back to the province and left to grow back to a natural state. The area is crown land which is accessible to the public. Activities which can take place include walking, hiking, swimming, use of off highway vehicles, shooting and camping name a few. The area would only be accessible by foot or off highway vehicle. No parking areas may need to be signed along RR23 to ensure we don't have issues with people parking further up the roads and accessing the area by foot, may require some focused enforcement to begin with.

Road Removal and Reclamation Costs: \$84,000

Funding Source: Restricted Surplus – Granular Aggregates

Timing: 2012/2013

Pros:

- No vehicle access other than off highway vehicles will likely result in many users looking for another spot to enjoy the river
- Becomes a less attractive spot for the large group gatherings
- Fulfills our requirements as outlined in our current provincial agreements regarding the area
- Cost is much less than developing the area into a park site

Cons:

- Lose an opportunity to provide river access for residents
- Camping can still legally occur for periods up to two weeks on crown land, after which camp must be broken and moved
- Shooting can still legally occur, the County Firearms Bylaw does not apply as this is not part of a subdivision
- Off Highway Vehicle use can legally occur at any hour of the day or night
- May result in parking issues along RR23
- If issues still occur in the area access by enforcement personnel to address them will be limited as well

Development of a River/Lake Access Strategy

Developed access to a number of water bodies within Parkland County is limited. In some cases there are municipal reserves or reserve areas along water bodies that provide limited, undeveloped access to the water body (ex. Hubble's Lake). There are some lakes where we have small developed day use areas to provide developed access, but these sites may or may not be meeting the access needs of the majority of residents that live around those water bodies. In the case of rivers in the County there are fewer municipal reserves or reserve areas, but more in the way of crown land that abuts the rivers (Pembina and North Saskatchewan) which provide undeveloped access. Given the steepness of some of the river banks, good access points are hard to find and what has happened in some instances is users are trespassing on private property to access the river. An alternative may be to focus on the development of a River/lake Access Strategy that identifies where access is needed around what water bodies, identify locations for access development, what amenities are required to support that access, what the costs are, what residents are willing to pay for, and a set of priorities as to what order they should be developed in. Extensive public consultation, that is statistically sound, would be required to identify our resident's needs and priorities.

In the case of RR23 Pit Area Administration would suggest that we work with the landowners in the area to address the trespassing issues occurring across private property. Improvements to the road block or placement in a different location may be required. The road would remain until our planning process is complete and it is determined whether or not this is one of the sites that are identified to use as a developed access point to the river. If this is not one of the sites suitable for development then we remove the road and reclaim the area. If it is identified as a suitable site then we pursue development of a Day Use Park.

Cost: \$100,000 (Estimated)

Funding Source: Restricted Surplus – Municipal Park

Timing: 2012-2013

Pros:

- County sets direction regarding water access based on overall community need
- Resident needs for water access are met

Cons:

- Time to complete plan
- RR23 Pit decision delayed until plan is complete
- Cost

***Option would be to reduce scope of this Alternative and focus on North Saskatchewan River Access only and not include Lakes. Less time and cost required to complete this option.**

Conclusion/Summary:

Administration supports the development of a Day Use Park Site.

Alternatives:

1. Road Removal and Reclamation of the Site
2. Development of a River/Lake Access Strategy*
 - a. Development of North Saskatchewan River Access Strategy Only

Summary:

The County is fortunate to have such an abundance of rivers and lakes that can be enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. Unfortunately, developed access is very limited and that is causing issues in some areas. The RR23 Pit area provides access to the North Saskatchewan River and sees a lot of use, some good and some bad. Area residents have raised concerns regarding the area and are seeking action by the County to address them. The options available to address the issues are to either develop it as a park site so that the County can more effectively manage and control the area; or reclaim the area and turn it all back to the crown. Administration believes that pursuing development of a park site is the more effective option.