



Flooding Creates Challenges for Monitoring Work

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AWA continued with its study of impacts from recreational use in the Bighorn Wildland's Hummingbird Recreation Area. Although the plan this year was to start in June or earlier, as had been done in the past, nature was having the last word on this occasion.

In June, the area received a tremendous amount of rain and snow, at record levels in some locations, and experienced flooding at a "100 year" level. Many roads and bridges into the area were closed due to being either damaged or destroyed. The Clearwater County had its work cut out for it this summer. This had the effect of delaying our first field trip into the study area until early July.

On the other hand, the catastrophic flooding gave us the unprecedented opportunity of seeing how robust this pristine area can be in handling extraordinary weather conditions. Unfortunately, there were some areas that looked less-than-natural as human use of the area seemed to exacerbate the flooding situation in some areas and damage in some locales was extensive.

We were able to collect data on another 58 kilometres of trail and now have over 95% of the area documented with written data and photographic evidence of the present condition of the trail systems.

The July trip and one in August were done under relatively luxurious conditions after the area had dried out. Blue skies, wildflowers, dry campsites and trails, and manageable stream levels were the norm. With the help of volunteers, work was able to move along quickly.

The second August trip and the season finale in September were done while the "other shoe dropped". Wet weather and later, snow, were the order of the day. No less beautiful was the scenery, but the work proceeded a tad more slowly. Regardless, it all got done, the field equipment is packed away, the interim report is completed, and work on bringing some of the results to light has commenced.

Planning for the 2006 season is underway. We look forward to getting back out into the area to see what it has in store for us next year, and to continue working on ensuring that others following us have an opportunity to see and enjoy the area in as pristine a condition as possible.

