

Living in the M.D. of Bighorn

Introduction

Welcome to the Municipal District of Bighorn No. 8! This guide has been prepared to assist all our residents in understanding the uniqueness of living in a rural agricultural environment or a rural hamlet. This guide is by no means complete, but is meant to provide some general guidelines, helpful hints and provide direction to resources. It is important to know that life in a rural setting can be very different from life in the city, availability of services may vary, and landowners are often faced with responsibilities not ordinarily found in an urban setting. The following information is provided to give you an overview of the issues you may encounter as a rural resident and we encourage you to give us a call for more information and resources.

Governance

Bighorn is a rural municipal district governed by a five member Municipal Council; the head of the Council is the Reeve, who is selected annually from the Council members. The municipality is divided into four wards each represented by a Councillor from within that ward; the exception is Ward 1-Exshaw which has two Councillors. The administrative office is located in the Hamlet of Exshaw. The M.D. of Bighorn has a number of boards and committees with representation from our ratepayers that help guide and advise Council on the business of the municipality. Information on the geographical boundaries, division of wards, board and committees, etc. is available through our office.

Guiding Documents

There are a number of key documents that guide the governance and service provision within the M.D. of Bighorn. These documents include: the Municipal Development Plan, the Land Use Bylaw, the Community Services Master Plan, etc. As well, there are a number of bylaws and policies that provide direction to Council.

Need More Information....

More details on much of the information included in this guide is either available on our website or check the website link page contained in this package.

Mother Nature

Fire

Homes built in forested areas face the very real potential of being damaged or destroyed by wildland fires. Consult a manual such as “*FireSmart: Protecting Your Community from Wildfire*” for detailed information.

Listed below are a few simple things all property owners can do to reduce the risk:

- Clear land around the house of excess trees and ground vegetation; a minimum 10 metre clear or “defensible space” around structures can help mitigate the spread of wildland fires to buildings.
- Replace combustible roofs and other building materials with non-combustibles; store combustible materials such as firewood away from your house.
- Maintain adequate access roads and driveways, and remove overgrowth and flammable vegetation immediately adjacent to the traveled roadway.
- If you live in an area with a civic address, have it posted and visible at the intersection of your driveway and the M.D. road.
- All other rural properties should have a green rural address sign that helps emergency services quickly locate your residence.
- Develop a fire safety plan for your home and your family.
- Many fires start from initially controlled burns in barrels, brush piles, etc. It is important that fires be attended at all times: be certain that the fire is completely out. Brush or debris burning is not allowed in hamlets. Burning permits are required in the Municipal District of Bighorn, and can be obtained from your local Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) office.
- Respect the danger of fire in wildland areas by learning more and **BE PREPARED**.

If you start a wildland fire, you will be responsible for paying the cost of extinguishing that fire. Please contact Bighorn Emergency Services for more information.

Wildlife

Rural development often encroaches on the natural habitat of animals/wildlife and will you need to know how to deal with them safely and effectively. In general, it is best to enjoy wildlife from a distance: let the animals be themselves, watch, but do not chase them or allow your pets to do so. Keep in mind that “a fed bear is a dead bear”: keep garbage and pet food inside. Take down bird feeders and put away salt licks during bear season (approximately the beginning of May until the end of October). Consult the **Bow Valley WildSmart** website for detailed information on how to interact with elk, cougars, and bears: www.bvwildsmart.ca.

Hunting

Many areas in the M.D. are open for hunting. While providing recreational opportunities, hunting is also a tool for managing wildlife populations. Property owners on acreages need to find out which Wildlife Management Unit their land is in and post signs accordingly.

Emergency Services

Emergency services in the M.D. of Bighorn are provided by volunteer fire departments located in Exshaw, Jamieson Rd. and Benchlands (Ghost) and by mutual aid agreements with the Cremona, Water Valley, Cochrane, Sundre, Canmore and Banff fire departments. Emergency response times for police, fire suppression, medical care, etc. generally take longer than in an urban area.

Finance

Taxation

Municipal property taxes are due on June 30 each year: this means payment for your property taxes must be in our office by the last working day of the month of June. It is your responsibility to ensure that the payment reaches our office by that date: if you take advantage of our “pay at your bank” option, please note that this does not relieve you from the responsibility of ensuring payment reaches the M.D. office before June 30th (that is, if your bank forwards payment after June 30th, you will be responsible for any late payment penalty). You will receive a combined assessment and tax notice in early May each year and you will have a period of time to appeal your assessment if you do not agree with the property value indicated.

Payment Options

Bighorn offers a number of payment options for property taxes and utility services. We have a monthly direct debit program, a telephone and on-line banking option, and payment on some bills at your bank (RBC, BMO, CIBC, Bow Valley Credit Union only), cash or cheque is available in person, and there is a 24hr secure drop slot to the left of our front doors in Exshaw.

School Declaration

As a new ratepayer in Bighorn, you need to make a school support declaration for the educational portion of your property taxes. Declaration forms are available on our website.

Keep Your Address Current

It is your responsibility to ensure that we have a current mailing address to which to send taxation, utility and other notices. If you need to change your address, please get a change of address form from our website or call the MD office for further details.

Developing Your Property

Developing property in a rural environment is very different than in an urban setting, and there are a lot of considerations to be made before beginning. The following are a few notes, but making an appointment to see someone in Bighorn’s Planning and Development Department is highly recommended.

Undeveloped Rural Land

- **Permits & Approvals:** Construction of residences and buildings in the M.D. require development permits. As well, permits are often required from other agencies, such as Alberta Transportation or Alberta Environment.
- Easements may require you to allow construction of roads, power lines, water lines, sewer lines, etc. across your land. Check these issues carefully by obtaining an up-to-date title for the property.
- Most property owners do not own the mineral rights under their property. Therefore you may be approached by companies looking to develop their mineral rights on your land.
- You may be provided with a plan of your property but unless the land has been surveyed and pins placed by a licensed surveyor, you cannot assume that the plan is accurate. Existing fences may also be misaligned and not reflect actual property lines. Verification of the location of property lines is the responsibility of the property owner.
- Understand future plans for the surrounding area in which are planning to develop. The Planning & Development Department can provide you with this information.
- It is important to make sure that you have sufficient water access to maintain pastures, gardens, livestock etc.

- Most creeks, streams, rivers and wetlands are regulated by either the Provincial or Federal Governments who establish setbacks and buffer zones adjacent to these various bodies of water. Natural vegetation cannot be disturbed in these areas. If you are contemplating development on property near water, marsh, or other wet areas, be sure to check with the Public Lands Division of SRD, Alberta Environment, and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans before commencing any work.
- The road quality needs to be appropriate for use by emergency response vehicles and is usually the responsibility of the landowner to construct and/or upgrade private access roads to M.D. standards.

Soils and Water

- You can determine the soil conditions on your property if you have a soil test performed by a qualified professional. It is recommended that this test be completed before any development or construction on the property.
- The topography of the land will tell you where water will go in the case of heavy precipitation. Pay close attention to these areas in order to determine how water will flow on your land and plan buildings accordingly. A dry gully may turn into a river during run-off and rainy seasons.

Water

In Harvie Heights, only the commercial buildings currently have municipal water. In Exshaw residents now have municipal water available to them (please contact the municipality for more information). All other areas of Bighorn must obtain their water from a private supply and the following information is extremely important.

You will need to find a water supply, sufficient to your needs. The most common sources of water in rural areas are private wells which are regulated by the Natural Resources Service, Alberta Environment. The cost for drilling and pumping can be considerable and the quality and quantity of well water can vary greatly from location to location and from season to season. Contact your local health unit for a chemical and bacterial analysis of your water. It is strongly advised that you research the issue of water wells very carefully. An excellent resource is a government publication called “*Water Wells That Last for Generations*” this publication is available for viewing on the Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development website, www.agric.gov.ab.ca or by calling the Publications office in Edmonton at 1-800-292-5697.

Sewer Systems

Municipal sewer systems are currently in place in Dead Man’s Flats, Exshaw and for commercial properties in Harvie Heights. In all other areas of Bighorn, you will need to use an approved on-site sewage disposal system or other treatment process (usually a septic system). The type of soil you have for a leach-field will be very important in determining the cost and function of your system. A sewage system tip sheet can be obtained from the M.D. office.

Regulation of private sewer systems is a provincial responsibility and it is up to the private landowner to maintain and replace the system as needed. Regardless of your type of system, periodic pump-out is required to make sure that the system functions properly and does not pose a risk to your water system. If you’ve purchase an older home and are not sure the state of system, it is highly recommended that you get it inspected and possibly consider having it replaced.

Agriculture

Agriculture is an important part of the M.D. of Bighorn and there are a couple of things to keep in mind where agribusiness is occurring.

- The scent of animals and their manure may be noticeable at times.
- It is essential that your livestock and pets remain within your own property boundaries.

- Noxious weeds require controlling, and some plants are poisonous to horses and other livestock. The Agricultural Department will be able to provide some information with regard to weeds. Another good contact is 310-FARM.
- All Animals, including farm animals, can behave unpredictably - especially during mating season. Please be aware of this and keep a safe distance.
- There is a limit to the amount of grazing the land can handle. Overgrazed land is susceptible to a number of ecological problems including weeds, erosion, and loss of habitat and productivity. It is very difficult to reclaim the land once it has been overused. Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development can help with these issues. The M.D.'s Agricultural Fieldman can also assist you in planning and improving your livestock arrangements.

Weed Control

Wherever you live in the M.D. of Bighorn, it is your responsibility to control noxious weeds. The M.D. of Bighorn has a publication that outlines all common noxious weeds in Alberta. If not controlled on private property, the M.D.'s Agricultural Fieldman and Weed Inspector may enter your property at any reasonable time without permission to conduct inspections as regulated by the Weed Control Act and Soil Conservation Act.

Rural Roads and Access

The M.D. of Bighorn maintains nearly a hundred kilometres of roads, but many rural properties are served by privately owned access roads maintained by private parties or other landowners. Alberta Transportation and various oil companies are responsible for more kilometres of roads in the municipality than the M.D. It is important to know who is responsible for the roads accessing your property and what agreements may be required. Some roads not maintained year round – no grading or snow ploughing, and certain public roads and rights-of -ways are not maintained by anyone. Make sure you know what type of road maintenance to expect and the service provider. Private roads and accesses are the responsibility of the landowners and unpaved roads can generate dust. If you reside on an unpaved road, you may want to have the road treated for dust suppression.

Rural roads present unique driving conditions and potential hazards (i.e. potholes, slow moving farm equipment, logging trucks, etc.). In extreme weather, even M.D.-maintained roads may become impassable due to weather impacts: it is important that you have an appropriate vehicle for using these roads under extreme conditions. Please be aware and drive responsibly.

Utility Services

Technology

Telephone service can be variable: cell phones may not work in all areas. If you have a private line, it may be difficult to obtain another line for fax or computer modem uses. Internet service is generally limited to either dial-up or satellite outside of the Bow Valley.

Electricity

- Electric service may not be readily available in every area of the Municipal District of Bighorn. It is important to determine the proximity of electrical power, as it can be very expensive to extend power lines to remote areas.
- It may be necessary to cross property owned by others in order to extend electric service to your property in the most cost efficient manner.
- If you have special power requirements, it is important to know what level of service can be provided to your property.
- Power outages can occur in outlying areas with more frequency than in developed areas, particularly if power lines are difficult to access. A loss of electric power can interrupt your supply of water from a well, the ability to use certain sewer systems, and flooding from loss of use of your sump pump.

Waste Management

Home pick-up of household garbage is not available in the M.D. of Bighorn. In hamlets, household garbage must be taken to centrally located bins within each community. Please make sure the garbage is placed inside the dumpster, as garbage left outside becomes an animal attractant.

There are three waste transfer sites, which include all Recyclables, in the Rural Areas within the M.D. of Bighorn. One is just off highway 68 (Volker Stevin) in the Sibbald/West Jumpingpound area, one is located just off of Highway 40, approximately two kilometres west of the Summer Village of Waiparous (on the right-hand side of the road: the site/entrance isn't signed), and the third is at the Jamieson Road Fire Hall. Rural residents that live outside these areas dispose of their Solid Waste by their own means and receive a yearly Garbage Rebate to offset the cost of Disposal.

Recycling depots are located in all hamlets and at the Cochrane Recycle Depot. Construction waste and larger items including furniture and old appliances can be taken to the Francis Cooke Regional Class III Landfill east of Exshaw. Recycling and Landfill information is available at the M.D. of Bighorn.

Community Services

Bighorn residents have access to recreational facilities and social services in neighbouring urban municipalities, but should be aware that there may be differential fees in place in some recreational facilities. Many areas of Bighorn have community associations that would welcome you as a member. The MD of Bighorn also runs a Community Services department that can assist you with accessing a wide range of programs and services.

Respect for Others

Maintaining good neighbour relations is an important part of rural living. Neighbours can be an invaluable resource for knowledge and help. A few common courtesies can go a long way.

- Dogs must be on leash in the hamlets of Dead Man's Flats, Harvie Heights and Lac Des Arcs.
- Dogs must be licensed in the above hamlets, as well as Exshaw.
- Keep in mind that although your neighbours may be spaced further apart than in the city, sound travels great distances in rural areas.
- Leaving junk lying around your property is not only an eyesore, it can be a health hazard (providing a nesting place for rodents, for example), and a fire hazard.
- If you go off the road, call the RCMP and contact the closest landowner, as animals may escape onto the road. The cost of repairing the fence is also your responsibility.

Please Contact Us for More Information

(403) 673-3611 (Bow Valley) or (403) 233-7678 (Calgary Direct)

E-mail – bighorn@mdbighorn.ca

Website – www.mdbighorn.ca

Our website has loads of valuable information, documents and links. Updated information is posted regularly on trail closures, fire bans, and upcoming events

Again, we welcome you to Municipal District of Bighorn and hope that you will find it a welcoming and wonderful place to call home.