

B.C. glacier resort clears giant hurdle

6,300-bed alpine village gets environmental OK

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Calgary Herald

October 15, 2004

A controversial \$450-million glacier ski resort development three hours west of Calgary, Thursday received environmental approval to proceed.

Jumbo Glacier Resort in the heart of B.C.'s Purcell Mountains would have ski runs with bigger vertical drops than even Whistler-Blackcomb.

It would see the creation of a four-season alpine village with close to 6,300 beds on a 104-hectare site where a sawmill once stood.

B.C. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development George Abbott said Jumbo Glacier Resorts Ltd. essentially passed provincial environmental and public interest tests and now must negotiate a master development agreement with the provincial Crown land agency and local governments.

"The final decision will be in the hands of those closest to the project," said Abbott.

He acknowledged bitter opposition to the project in the Kootenays near Invermere, a mountain community 270 kilometres west of Calgary in the Columbia Valley.

"The government recognizes that there are strongly held views surrounding this project," said Abbott. "Those who will benefit most directly and who most directly understand the costs will have the final say here."

Jacqueline Pinsonneault, president of the Jumbo Creek Preservation Society, said her group will fight the development on two fronts, moving to convince the regional government not to supply the needed zoning, while targeting the international investors behind the project.

"We believe the government has completely ignored the science and completely ignored the people of the area," Pinsonneault told the Herald. "But we're not going to spend too long lamenting this decision, because we have work to do."

Ski industry officials say the resort could bring huge investment and jobs to the area, which already serves as a recreational property playground for Calgarians.

"There's a couple of levels of very significant benefit, one being employment in general," said Matt Mosteller of Calgary's Resorts of the Canadian Rockies, which owns ski centres at Lake Louise, Nakiska and Fernie, B.C.

"There's a significant number of man-hours that go into the construction of a mountain resort,



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Canadian Alpine Ski Team racers train each summer on the Farnham Glacier, part of the ski terrain where developers want to build an alpine village.

then there's the ongoing payroll and then there's the ongoing spinoff from everybody living and spending in the community."

The resort's skiable terrain would cover about 6,000 hectares, about one-third the size of Whistler and be serviced by up to 23 lifts. Jumbo's key attraction would be the length of its runs. Jumbo would provide a vertical drop of close to 1,700 metres compared to 1,530 metres at Whistler.

Even in summer the resort would have 700 metres of glacier skiing. That has attracted the Canadian Alpine Ski Team to the area's Farnham Glacier for summer training in recent years.

The resort proposal has roots stretching back two decades and has been in some form of review for close to 14 years. The environmental review received more than 5,000 pieces of correspondence, most of them opposing the project due to concerns about economic impact, waste management and the impact on wildlife, including grizzly bears.

Among the opposition are the three deep-pocketed Calgary-based owners of R.K. Heli-Skiing Panorama Inc. -- Tom Brinkerhoff, president of Brinkerhoff Drilling 2000 Inc.; Tristone Capital Inc. chairman George Gosbee and Hank Swartout, chairman of Precision Drilling Corp.

Headquartered at Panorama, R.K. Heli-Skiing has rights to use more than 144,000 hectares in the Jumbo area. R.K. says the Jumbo project could effectively kill the famed heli-skiing operation. Jumbo would affect four per cent of the land R.K. uses and as much as 60 per cent of its skier visits.

"This is basically a war over land use. We are in a war," Brinkerhoff said Thursday. "We aren't going away, so for us this is Round 2."

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Jumbo Glacier

(elevation: 3,419 metres vertical drop: 1,700 metres, the longest in North America)

Jumbo Glacier Resort

- Location: On an old sawmill site in the upper Jumbo Creek Valley, about 54 kilometres west of Invermere and 36

kilometres from Panorama Mountain Village

- Total development in the base resort area: 104 hectares (Panorama has 336 hectares)

- Total bed units: about 6,300

- Upon completion, the resort is expected to employ 750 to 800 people.

This story features factboxes "Jumbo glacier" and "Jumbo glacier resort".

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