

B.C. gives approval to year-round ski resort



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The B.C. government has given the go-ahead for development of a controversial ski resort on the Jumbo Glacier field, 55 kilometres west of Invermere in the Purcell Mountain range.

For more than a

decade, developers have been eyeing the area for a year-round ski resort. It's near the Alberta border, and is an ideal spot to attract tourists from two provinces as well as the United States.

On Thursday, the British Columbia government said that the environmental concerns had been dealt with, and gave the go-ahead for developers to proceed.

The glacier offers powder snow almost all year. Developers plan to build a resort with 23 ski lifts and accommodation for 5,000 guests.

The ski resort proposal has divided the small community of Invermere. The project could eventually provide 3,750 person years of construction employment and create 750 to 800 permanent full-time jobs.

The Jumbo Creek Conservation Society has raised environmental concerns. The region is home to a dwindling population of grizzly bears in the Purcell Valley, and the glacier feeds the Columbia Valley Watershed.

But the group has also raised the issue of potential financial burdens to local taxpayers, due to infrastructure and service provisions to the proposed development.

"I'm no tree hugger," said Bob Campsell of the Conservation Society, "but I can't understand why they are bent on a big European-style development."

Grant Costello, vice-president of Glacier Resorts Ltd., said the company has plans to protect the bears and keep the water supply pure. "We have no desire to ravage the wilderness -- it would drive away the people we are trying to attract," he said.

Now that the province has given thumbs-up to the project, it is up to the regional district of East Kootenay to decide if re-zoning applications will be approved at the local level.