

Village supporting Jumbo

Ian Cobb
ECHO EDITOR

The Village of Radium Hot Springs has voted to support the Jumbo Glacier Resort Ltd. (GRL) project.

Just as the District of Invermere is doing, the village has opted to respond to an Environmental Assessment Office (EAO) invitation for local government comment on the \$450 million ski resort proposal for the Upper Jumbo Creek Valley, 55 km west of Invermere.

While the district is stating opposition, the village is stating its support.

"As a community with an economy that is dependent in large measure on tourism, we also support the project for the boost that it will give the international profile of tourism in this region and the province as a whole. We believe that a mature tourism industry, cognizant of the need to protect the natural resources on which it depends, is a good partner for a vigilant government in ensuring the health of our environment," states the conclusion of the village's two-page letter of support to the EAO.

Village council wrestled with two main issues of public policy, the letter explains.

"We believe that the first priority is to gauge the carrying capacity of the public land in question under the various existing and proposed uses. We are concerned with the protection of the natural assets of our region, out of respect for their intrinsic wild value, and in recognition of the economic value they represent as the foundation of our tourism industry. We recognize that any public use is likely to have some impact, but we also believe that some impacts are much more feasible to manage than others," the village statement reads.

The village's second priority follows that once use limits are realized, the type of backcountry commercial use which provides the "highest value to the province" should be established.

"We acknowledge that this may favour some commercial uses which compete with existing patterns of public recreation, but we also believe that, as responsible members of the public, we have to expect to make some tradeoffs in return for the demands we place on government services. We acknowledge that this may also lead to a review of some existing commercial uses to see whether they

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Village statement of support

continue to provide the greatest return to the public when compared to new options that weren't considered when the original tenures were granted," council stated.

While noting it believes carrying capacity concerns have been addressed in the "extensive review" of the GRL proposal, village council stated, "Our understanding of the conclusions of the technical review is that there is general agreement that most effects on the natural environment can be managed within reasonable limits. The exception is a disagreement on the impact to grizzly bears in the Central Purcell region: that disagreement having to do fundamentally with which methods of mitigation are acceptable."

The GRL project will provide the biggest return for the use of the land, the village council contends in its letter.

"Local governments in the region have expressed concern repeatedly over the scope and number of tenures being granted under the province's Backcountry Commercial Tenure program. These tenures are being granted in the absence of any serious investigation into carrying capacity and for remarkably small payment to the public for the use of Crown land (\$1 to \$4 per customer day)," it noted.

As for RK Heli-Ski Ltd.'s contention that the GRL project will kill it, the village stated: "This commercial user pays approximately \$12,000 in annual user fees to the province for a tenure encompassing approximately 145,000 hectares. When we contrast (GRL), whose operation on 104 ha of developed land (within a ski area boundary of 5,900 ha) is expected to pay \$3.2 million in annual local and provincial government property taxes at build out, we are puzzled why this striking difference doesn't form a larger part of the discussion around this project.

"Everything doesn't come down to money, but money is what our government uses to pay such people as nurses, teachers and conservation officers. Until we in the public choose to forego many of the services we now expect from government, we need to expect our governments to look for the most responsible ways to provide those services. The very careful allotment of our ever more precious wild land, in order to receive the highest return to the public for the least amount of public land, strikes us as an appropriate course to follow.

See "Support" on Page 8

Support stated for reduced design

From Page 1

"For this reason, in the context of overall public policy, the Village of Radium Hot Springs supports the (GRL) proposal in the reduced scale of its most recent design. We do so with the firm expectation that the province will meet its critical responsibility to ensure

that the technical solutions, outlined in the EAO review for development in the backcountry, are built into the project and operated properly for the life of the project."

Please see a special Q&A story with village mayor Greg Deck above.

NEWS

Mayor answers questions on GRL support

Part One

Ian Cobb
ECHO EDITOR

The Village of Radium Hot Springs is sending a letter of support of the Glacier Resort Ltd. (GRL) proposal for the Upper Jumbo Creek Valley, to the Environmental Assessment Office.

The Echo asked mayor Greg Deck, who is also chair of the Regional District of East Kootenay board of directors, a series of questions related to the announcement of council's support and after he received council's input, he responded. The following are the results of the Q & A.

Q1) How are you going to explain your and RDEK's position that all development must be restricted to developed areas and then be fully supportive of a development 55 km from Invermere, or 37 km from Panorama, the nearest human settlement. Also, do you not fear that a precedent is being set allowing the Beckers, Wilfleys, Scott Barsby and others to return with plans or to devise other plans for backcountry development?

A1) "My answer would be that we still support that RDEK position wherever it is possible. In Mr. (Fred) Becker's case, I would point out that his application was essentially for a residential subdivision, and that we have existing communities devoted to human settlement where the infrastructure for them is already in place. We would like to add to those instead of creating new satellite neighbourhoods. We also felt the Wilfley golf course (proposal in the Horsethief Creek drainage) could also best be dealt with in the existing highway corridor rather than by moving into a largely undeveloped drainage. What distinguishes an alpine resort is that — by definition — it can only be developed in that alpine terrain. There aren't options within existing serviced areas. We did oppose the early notion that GRL should also contain a golf course."

As for the Barsby application, I would emphasize the second issue in the Radium comment, namely the amount of benefit to the public that we should insist on in those few locations where we would consider backcountry development. The tenure fees and taxes to local and provincial govern-

ments were of a completely different scale in Scott's application than would be extracted from the GRL project."

Q2) When they do appear with plans in hand, how will you be able to explain that one project is better than another, just because of a perceived greater good for the province? Can it not be argued their proposals are also for the greater good?

A2) "The return to the province as a whole for a satellite housing development is no more than it would be for a similar amount of housing built as in-fill within an existing community. Similarly, Copper Point and Eagle Ranch have provided the benefit of additional golf courses without opening a new drainage to development. The GRL development is tied to a single site in a way that the others you mention are not. The province will have to forego that return to the public altogether if the project is not permitted on the glacier. That is a perfectly reasonable option, but it is different than suggesting it could be achieved elsewhere."

Q3) Do you fear, down the road, potential legal ramifications on the regional level due to this precedent being established? Will the RDEK have to revise its land use policy?

A3) The RDEK has not taken a position in support or opposition of the GRL project. The Village of Radium is discussing a comment on an EA technical review, and has included some additional comments on public policy around the use of Crown land. If the GRL project comes to the RDEK for a re-zoning application, all the members of the board will have to consider any new information that arises in the course of a public hearing before they make a decision. That said, we believe Radium's position has not changed on how the region should handle human settlement, and we continue to practice a much more careful use of land for housing than other jurisdictions. We do see a resort like this as a different issue. There is another important question around how many resorts we think the backcountry can bear, and there, too, we think a very few high-density projects are much preferable to many small ones."

Q4) You note that RK Heli-Ski operates on 145,000 hectares and Jumbo will only use 5,900 ha, but didn't mention RK only actually uses 9% of that terrain for skiing,



Greg Deck

ment's drive to lure more investment in B.C.?)

A4) "I agree that there is a large difference between eight cents per hectare, based on 145,000 hectares, and 91 cents per hectare, based on 9% of 145,000 hectares. My point would still be that there is a much larger difference between either of those numbers and \$542 per hectare, especially since that number is based on the entire ski use area, rather than the 110 or so hectares from which all of that taxation will come. My point is that the province, like any responsible landlord, needs to try to get the largest possible return for shareholders while still protecting the asset. Tenures, such as RK Heli-Ski's, are owned by business people, as you mention, who no doubt understand that rents often change in response to demand for the product. They would certainly choose new customers willing to pay much more for their product over long-standing customers who insisted on paying much less. Why should the public not enjoy the same ability for its asset?"

Q5) You note that \$3.2 million in local and provincial government taxes will be realized at build out and are puzzled why this striking difference doesn't form a larger part of the discussion around this project. Certainly, Jumbo will provide more tax dollars to the province for the use of that land but has the village considered the social costs that will be incurred by the valley community? How much of that \$3.2 million (at build out, which is probably more than 20 years down the road) will come back to this community? Will it be enough to cover the added costs for policing, health care, draws on victim services, the Family Resource Centre, search and

Why not mention that? Is RK's survival also not for the greater good,

especially considering the fact three Albertans invested in the company (which kind of makes them the poster children for Gordon Campbell's govern-

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Deck answers support questions

Part Two

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Q6) Do you believe the province will just throw cash at this area just because it approves Jumbo? The \$3.2 million (tax) figure is at build out. The first phase of this project will create an immediate drain on the police, ambulance and medical services in this region with almost no financial benefit being realized in the early going, aside from construction jobs. As a chief regional elected official, does this potential impact on already depleted social resources not concern you?

A6) "Any population heavy to young men, be it construction workers or students, requires a disproportionate amount of policing. That said, young men who are working require less policing than young men who aren't, so construction jobs work both ways.

The young man who is able to work here after high school instead of leaving for Calgary may think that his employment in the valley where he grew up shouldn't be seen as such a huge social calamity. And yes, assessment doesn't exist for taxation until it is built. Are you proposing that construction shouldn't start because there is a six-month lead-time before BC Assessment adjusts its property value rolls?

Any investment requires money or other resources up front in order to receive the return later. I think we have to endure that phase to get to the next."

Q7) In the Final Project Report the proponent states that the Toby/Jumbo road is better than the Sea-to-Sky Highway. He does not propose for this road to be transformed into a proper highway. Does it not seem a trifle irresponsible and dangerous to build a major resort that far from the established valley community without there being a Ministry of Highways standard, paved, two-lane road bed in place, with all the requisite guard rails, rock and snow shelters etc.?

A7) "I don't know what you are referring to in the report. I have heard the proponent say that the current state of the road to Jumbo is safer than the road to Whistler was when that project began. In any case, I think speed is not the best benchmark for the quality of the road. Safety (in terms of sufficient width to meet large vehicles and barriers to protect drivers from paying too high a price for a driving error) is more important.

There are likely to be fewer fatalities when traffic is moving at 50 or 60 km/h than when it is moving at 90 or 100 km/h. I also think it is reasonable to scale servicing for the traffic.



Greg Deck

assessment won't be realized until the end of a 20 or 30 year build out and then demand that full servicing go in at the start? The road to Panorama has improved in stages as the project has grown, as is the case with Whistler. Demanding an expensive road up front strikes me as simply an indirect way of denying the application. There are direct ways for the province to deny the application if that is their intent."

Q8) To establish such a roadway, it is estimated it will cost between \$55 million and \$110 million (MOT figures). As it is extremely unlikely the proponent's backers would be willing to cough up such cash, how then will this project be such a boon for the greater good of B.C. when this province's existing highway infrastructure is such a brutal and embarrassing mess, if the province gets fooled into doling out dough for its construction?

A8) "I would expect this ski hill proponent to ask for what other ski hills receive. At Mt. Washington and Kicking Horse, that means access to money to be borrowed from the province and repaid with an additional fee on lift tickets, at such time as the proponent and the province agree that road upgrades are required beyond the initial upgrades that will simply be paid by the proponent.

It will be up to the province, in that scenario, to decide if the resort is a good risk to have enough clients over the term of the loan to be able to repay it. I think that kind of investment decision is different than being "fooled into doling out dough."

Q9) RK has suggested to the proponent that if it moves its plans a few kilometres to the north, out of Jumbo but still in great powder skiing terrain, the two companies could co-exist. The proponent has allegedly said it is doable but too expensive to consider because of access. Would the village still be in support of this project, as it is for the greater good of B.C., if the resort was accessed via Horsethief or Forster Creek roads?

A9) "Speculation is always a reach, but if either of those locations offered a truly comparable site with comparable ability to mitigate the effects, I expect that our arguments in favour would stand.

That said, I expect that neither of those locations come with either the ease of access or the same skiing assets that the GRL proposal provides."

Q10) Was the village's position unanimous among council? If not, can you provide me with a breakdown on how the vote went?

A10) "It was unanimous. Brent (Frederickson) was not present for the meeting but played a strong role in developing the position and endorsed the wording on his return.

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