

## Tentative approval for ski resort arrives at the speed of a glacier

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VICTORIA - The Jumbo Glacier resort made its first appearance on the provincial government radar screen 131/2 years and half a dozen premiers ago.

The proposal called for an alpine ski resort nestled among a quartet of glaciers in the Purcell Mountains west of Invermere.

The big-thinking proponents modelled their plan on the Swiss resort town of Zermatt.

They envisioned half a billion dollars worth of development and enough accommodation for more than 5,000 overnights and several thousand day skiers.

They proposed to start building as soon as they could on the site of an abandoned sawmill in an area that had previously been worked over by both the mining and forestry industries.

In short, it seemed like exactly the sort of project the B.C. government was inviting when it crafted a policy to promote the development of commercial alpine ski resorts in formerly resource-dependent parts of the province.

But in light of subsequent events, you have to wonder if the policy was more of a trap than an invitation.

The would-be developer, Glacier Resort Ltd., gained first-stage approval as "sole proponent" for a resort on that particular site in early 1993.

Two years later -- the blink of an eye in bureaucratic terms -- the province began a formal environmental assessment.

But then it bogged down in a succession of land use and planning processes, consultations and reviews of one kind or another.

The 10-year mark in this saga brought the election of a new administration, dedicated to "cutting red tape" and "clearing obstacles" to development in the province.

Still, it took more than three years for the new crowd to "expedite" the process.

By the time the resort entered into the positively-last-and-we-mean-it-final phase of environmental review this year, the required studies and reviews had filled 13 volumes and a staggering 3,722 pages.

These addressed everything from the impact of global warming to the possible threats to the nesting grounds of the Harlequin duck.

With all that in hand, the bureaucracy recommended approval. This week a trio of Liberal cabinet ministers signed the certificate that will allow the project to move to the next stage.

It was anything but a blank cheque. The certificate comes with 15 non-negotiable conditions.

The proponent is bound to deliver on 195 written commitments.

The proposed resort was scaled back by 60 per cent overall, eliminating one lodge and forcing the relocation of other parts of the project.

Glacier Resorts will have to provide tertiary sewage treatment, a first nations interpretive and environmental monitoring station and a long list of infrastructure and services.

Other clauses in the agreement range from "no artificial modification of glaciers" to a commitment to combat hiking, kayaking and the use of all-terrain vehicles.

In releasing all this detail Thursday, cabinet minister George Abbott acknowledged that the approval process -- "13 years and counting" -- was far from complete.

A display on the company website ([www.jumboglacierresort](http://www.jumboglacierresort.com)

.com) indicated that it was maybe the halfway mark in terms of steps along the way.

Glacier Resorts still needs to negotiate a Ski Area Master Plan and a Master Development Agreement.

Abbott, clearly an optimist, guessed it might clear those hurdles by the end of 2005.

From then it will be a presumably brisk march through the requisite approvals under 18 provincial and six federal statutes. "This list is not comprehensive," says a cautionary footnote in an appendix to the agreement.

Nor is that the end of it. Still to be resolved is a turf war with a rival helicopter skiing firm and another between adjacent first nations, one approving the project, the other rejecting it.

Last call goes to the regional district. Victoria has the power to override zoning approval but it won't do that, Abbott promised Thursday.

As the day ended, the opponents -- and there are many, with some legitimate concerns -- vowed to fight on and kill the project however they can.

Over at Glacier Resorts, the news was greeted with a candid "mixture of relief and celebration."

The press release acknowledged "we would not have dreamed" when entering into the process that it would take this long to get this far.

Still, the proponents did express gratitude that the province had finally, after all these years, put some sort of stamp of approval on the project.

They didn't need to add that, as an advertisement for investing in B.C, this reads less like a good news story than a worst-case scenario.

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