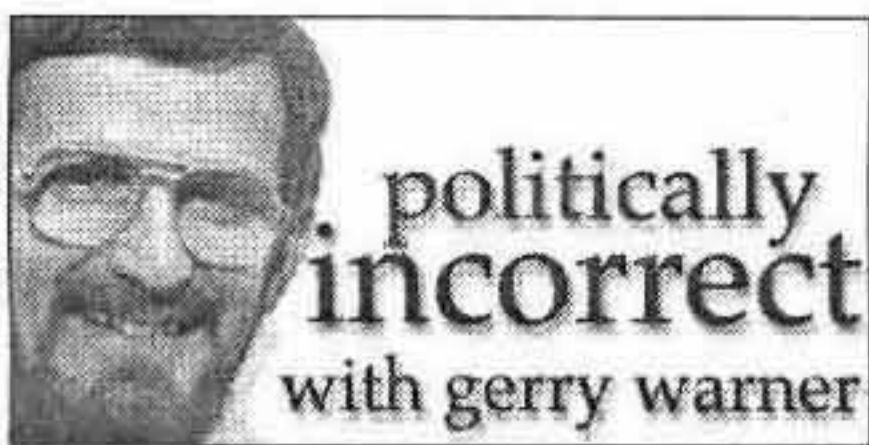


There are worse alternatives than a Jumbo resort

By the time you read this, the Regional District of East Kootenay will have made its long-anticipated decision on the proposed Jumbo Glacier ski resort. So I'm at a bit of a disadvantage now (Thursday) in trying to put down my thoughts on this extremely contentious issue.



Nevertheless here goes.

In my opinion, the greatest single argument in favour of Jumbo is global warming. How's that you say? The answer is simple. At the rate global warming is occurring in B.C. now most of the province's downhill ski resorts will be out of business in 50 years, quite possibly less.

This year is a bit of an exception. The Christmas ski conditions were disastrous, as usually is the case these days, but it snowed big-time in January producing great conditions although the prime money-making part of the season was a washout. In the nine years I've lived in this neck of the woods, I've only seen two good Christmas ski seasons. It's hard to make a profit on that.

So why would Jumbo be any different? Once again the answer is simple — elevation. The top runs on Jumbo will be over 11,000 feet. That's almost twice as high as Whistler-Blackcomb and more than 3,000 feet higher than Kicking Horse or Panorama, the highest in the province now. More often than not, when it's raining at all the other ski resorts in B.C. it will be snowing at Jumbo, giving it a huge advantage. And even with global warming, that advantage should last well over 100 years in the future while all the other low-elevation ski resorts in B.C. will have long given up on downhill skiing to concentrate on summer activities like golf, mountain biking and hiking.

Because it will be the only ski resort in the province built on glaciers, global warming will work to Jumbo's advantage despite anything the project's critics might say.

Another major criticism leveled at Jumbo is that it will harm the endangered grizzly bear population in the area. I'm not a wildlife biologist, but common sense tells me this is a weak argument. Talk to any hunter or guide-outfitter around here. They'll tell you we have a thriving grizzly population. Perhaps they have a vested interest in saying this, but hikers and others who venture into the Kootenay backcountry say the same thing.

And the Jumbo Resort is confined to one creek drainage in a remote part of the Purcell Range on the edge of the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy, the largest roadless area in the region.

I think a bad berry season will be more of a threat to the Grizzly population than this proposed resort.

Another argument against Jumbo is that it will be plunking down a major resort with several thousand housing units into the middle of a pristine wilderness. Those of us who live around here know this isn't quite true because the road into the Jumbo area has existed for more than 75 years and logging and mining have been carried on in the area for the same length of time.

And it's more than a little ironic and a tad hypocritical for the Jumbo critics to raise this point given that many of them use the logging and mining roads in the area to access Jumbo themselves.

I'm not ashamed to declare my own bias at this point. I've used those same roads and trails to access the Jumbo area. And it's indeed a spectacular scenic area and it would be a tragedy to see it desecrated. But what if the resort doesn't go ahead? What then? Well, you don't need to be a rocket scientist to figure that out. The forests in the Jumbo area will be clear-cut logged again as they have in the past.

And in this writer's opinion that would be every bit as much of a desecration as the proposed resort. In fact, I think it would be worse.. Call me a jerk if you want, but that's my honest opinion. If a choice has to be made, I quite frankly would prefer a well-planned and environmentally-sensitive ski resort in the Jumbo area to any more intrusion by resource extraction industries like logging or mining.

And I'm sorry to say this, but I can't help but feel there's a strong whiff of environmental hypocrisy in the Jumbo debate. Invermere, the very town which is most strongly opposed to the Jumbo project, is also the town that has desecrated the Rocky Mountain Trench with more urban sprawl than any other community in the valley. Septic seepage from the urban sprawl around Invermere has so polluted Windermere Lake that it's in danger of becoming a giant weed bed instead of a natural lake filled with fish and waterfowl.

And in the height of hypocrisy a year or so back, EKES/Wildsight staged a Living Lakes Conference at Invermere and all they talked about was Jumbo while totally ignoring a lake dying at their feet.

Jumbo has been a divisive and bitter issue in this valley and I hate to add fuel to the fire, but I also feel a little bit of honesty about the debate won't hurt.