

**Dear Wilderness Defender,**

The federal government is seeking public comments until January 4 on a proposed plan to allow summer chair lift operations and tourism into what is now secure grizzly habitat in Banff National Park. We hope you will take a moment to ask decision makers to protect Banff Park wildlife and keep this important summer wildlife habitat secure, as was promised as part of a previous expansion of the ski hill's footprint.

- Carolyn Campbell, AWA Conservation Specialist

**In This Issue:**

Mt. Norquay Proposal to Break Banff Park Wildlife Assurances

AWA

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**The Issue**

In the 1980s, Mt Norquay ski lift operators agreed they would forgo summer use of an important wildlife habitat area frequented by grizzly, bighorn sheep and elk in return for expanding the footprint and impact of their winter operations. Under the new proposed plan, this agreement would be broken and wildlife will lose again.

**Background**

November 1988 is the first Action Alert we have in our Wilderness Resource Centre and Library that AWA wrote to you, our members and supporters, about Mount Norquay Ski Area development plans. The Action Alert eloquently describes Mt. Norquay as a serene mountain wilderness characterized by rare plants, bird communities, significant wildlife habitat and corridor, and pre-historic cultural resource sites. That vision of Mt. Norquay's natural values and need for protection is accompanied by descriptions of plans to allow expansion and the premonition that promises would be broken.

Commercial skiing is not actually allowed in National Parks, except for those that were established before current day national parks legislation. In 1975, the Parks Service set down a downhill Skiing Policy which explained. "...It is not in the best long term interests of Parks Canada to allow development to continue indefinitely on a demand responsive basis. It is to the advantage of the ski area operators to know the limits, to which they can develop so that they can design, finance and operate accordingly..." Long range plans were developed accordingly for the four downhill ski areas in the National Parks and in May 1989 the long-range plan for Norquay was approved by Lucien Bouchard, Minister of the Environment.

A May 1989 Calgary Herald article reported: "Under the redesign, 17 hectares of intermediate slopes will be added. So will a new lodge and several new lifts. But as a tradeoff, Norquay will eventually relinquish control over several slopes which currently overlook Banff townsite and which are considered prime terrain for mountain sheep." Within the plan approved by Parks Canada a December 31, 1990 date is given for commercial summer use of the gondola and Cliff House to be discontinued.

In a [June 27, 1996](#) letter that Arthur Haenni of Banff Lifts Ltd. wrote to Mike McIvor of Bow Valley Naturalists, he explained that "the only way we could advance our ski area proposal was to promise a reduction of impact on environmentally sensitive areas like Widow-Maker and the area around Cliff House. This could only be done by sacrificing our summer operations. ...We had to give something in order to get the additional terrain we needed for our expanded winter operation. Summer use was all we had to trade."

Fast forward to December 17, 2012 and a Calgary Herald article: "By summer, Mount Norquay wants operation of a chairlift to the historic Cliff House. There, visitors could take in the mountain vistas or, if they are more adventurous, try out

the via ferrata — a series of steel cables, ladders and bridges to the upper cliffs... The debate essentially pits the future of a provincially threatened species [the grizzly bear] against the survival of the first ski hill to be built in the Canadian Rockies.”

And so you have it – the saga of a commercial ski operation, broken promises and wildlife at risk in the one area we as Canadians should believe their protection will be foremost.

Norquay’s [long range plan](#) is open for public input until January 4, 2013 and AWA feels certain it will have major implications for wildlife. An [environmental assessment](#) shows the area is frequented by grizzly bears, bighorn sheep and elk from May through October.

AWA has long fought against expansion of any commercial ski operations within the national parks; we don’t have any reason to feel differently about this expansion and long range plan. We think that the broken promise of no summer use, and the almost certain negative impact on wildlife including Alberta’s threatened grizzly bears and important wildlife corridors, are vital concerns that cannot be addressed.

G.D. Wilkie, Bow Valley Naturalist President, wrote on December 1, 1988: “Why cannot the Canadian Parks Service simply say “no” to facility developments on the grounds that its responsibility is to protect heritage resources? Why indeed!

#### **Take Action**

Please take a moment to write and let these decision makers know that the long term plans for Mr. Norquay Ski Hill and operations should honour previous agreements and not compromise more valuable summer wildlife habitat.

Honourable Peter Kent, Minister of Environment, [Minister@ec.gc.ca](mailto:Minister@ec.gc.ca)

Mr. Dave McDonough, Superintendent, Banff National Park,

[dave.mcdonough@pc.gc.ca](mailto:dave.mcdonough@pc.gc.ca)

Mr. Alan Latourelle, CEO, Parks Canada Agency, [alan.latourelle@pc.gc.ca](mailto:alan.latourelle@pc.gc.ca)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan, Liberal Environment Critic, [kirsty.duncan@parl.gc.ca](mailto:kirsty.duncan@parl.gc.ca)

Ms. Megan Leslie, NDP Environment Critic, [megan.leslie@parl.gc.ca](mailto:megan.leslie@parl.gc.ca)

And please send a copy of your letter to [ccampbell@abwild.ca](mailto:ccampbell@abwild.ca), to keep in our files for reference in the years to come. Thank you!

#### ***Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action***

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