

Fortress Ski Hill Approved to Truck Mountain Water to Calgary for Sale

AWA learned in mid-November that the Alberta government has approved Fortress Mountain ski business' request to remove 50 million litres per year of water from Kananaskis country and truck that water to a Calgary water bottling facility to sell. Fortress' 1968 water license was granted to provide drinkable water for its ski hill patrons. This license now has an authorized purpose of "Commercial (Truck Fill Station)" for half its allocation, up to 50 million litres per year. AWA strongly op-

- removing water from a small mountain stream flowing into a protected area in the Bow River basin headwaters;
- greenhouse gas emissions to pump and transport thousands of truckloads per year of water that already flows naturally to Calgary; and
- helping to promote bottled/canned water as 'purer' than high quality municipal drinking water, when we need to greatly reduce our overall packaging and waste.

The Alberta government confirmed it received roughly 200 statements of concern from the public during the 30-day public feedback period. A government spokesperson told reporters that none of these were considered 'valid' statements of concern. That's because none of the citizens were 'directly affected', which in Alberta basically means having nearby property rights. AWA and many of our members and supporters were among those whose statements of concern were disqualified on these grounds. Unlike some Canadian federal laws and American laws, the nar-

row rules of Alberta's Water Act and other provincial laws do not recognize any 'genuine public interest' right to have legal standing in public lands and public waters decisions.

AWA believes that Alberta's approval of Fortress' water trucking idea sets a very poor precedent for the water-constrained Bow and Oldman River basins. Other water license holders upstream of Calgary and Lethbridge may now also apply for 'truck fill stations' to withdraw and sell their unused headwaters stream allocations. Re-allocating and commercializing our headwaters stream flows this way could limit our options in responding to future drought conditions, which are anticipated to intensify with climate change impacts.

In its decision, the Alberta government required Fortress to stop diverting water when flows are below 45 percent of the natural flow of the mountain stream. This is a weak limit for two reasons: first, 45 percent applied to headwaters generally is far too low to avoid ecological damage. Second, a more intensively allocated headwaters stream cannot offset to the same extent low flows in another part of the Bow headwaters. Mountain 'headwaters' lands receive snow, rain, and melting glacier water that provide most of the flows of the Bow and other major Alberta rivers. This water benefits mountain ecosystems, absorbs into the ground and provides essential year-round 'base flows' to our rivers.

AWA believes Fortress ski hill should have the highest water conservation practices possible given its privileged position surrounded by Alberta mountain parks. Trucking and selling bottled mountain water definitely doesn't meet that standard. We ask concerned Albertans to oppose this water use by respectfully writing Fortress ski hill (thomas.heath@skifortress.com), the Alberta Minister of Environment and Parks (AEPMinister@gov.ab.ca), and their MLA (https://www.assembly.ab.ca/net/index.aspx?p=mla_home).

- Carolyn Campbell