

**Media Release**  
**Abraham Glacier Resort FOIPPed**

December 18, 2003

Martha Kostuch has received over 350 pages of information from the Departments of Economic Development and Environment about the Abraham Glacier Wellness Resort under the Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act (FOIPP).

The information indicates that the proponent feels that hot springs and a golf course are important to the success of the development. There are no hot springs in the area and the current proposal does not include a golf course.

The information also indicates that there is significant support for requiring an environmental impact assessment by both the government and the public.

According to a biophysical inventory done for the Whitegoat Lakes Development Node where the proposed development would be located, there are significant constraints on development and much of the Node should be protected.

Martha Kostuch, President of ALERT, the Alberta League for Environmentally Responsible Development, said, "Based on the information I received under FOIPP, I believe the Director was wrong not to call an environmental impact assessment. The information I received also shows that the Whitegoat Lakes Development Node is not suitable for the proposed development."

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For more information, call Martha Kostuch – 403-845-4667.

## Excerpts from the Information Received Under FOIPP

At a March 2002 meeting with provincial and municipal government officials, Dan McCarger, the proponent, inquired "if there were any hot springs in the area and the possibility of a golf course, all of which he felt were important to the success of the development."

A January 6, 2003 note from Butch Shenfield, Area Manager, Lands & Forest Division, makes the following comments regarding the proposal: "Seems very loose right now in that the proponent agrees with everything and everything seems to go. They have a fair bit of work to do to get this on firmer ground." He goes on to say, "Early to tell yet, but may be likely an EIA would be appropriate."

A March 31, 2003 briefing note to the Minister states, "the nature of the project is such that categorically it cannot be determined that an EIA report is not required."

An April 1, 2003 note from Butch Shenfield states, "We have reviewed what is available so far (which is limited in regards to environmental impacts) and from the Forest Area view, we strongly recommend that an EIA should be carried out for this project, mainly due to water use and waste water disposal. There are a number of other environmental impacts that need to be carried out as well, but water use and disposal are at the top of the list."

A May 8, 2003 note from Mel White, Land Use Operations Branch, states, "The letter from the Aurum Lodge is a good review...From these concerns it is obvious there is not enough economic or environmental information to make an informed decision on the project. This is a rather ambitious undertaking with very little information (water, soils, wildlife habitat, vegetation, etc) submitted to date, in fact the report only has a small section on pages 4 & 5. This report does not address what the environmental effects of the project are."

Telephone Record for June 12, 2003: "Larry North and Monica Micek contacted Jim Allen, Area Wildlife Biologist Management SRD, June 12, 2003 at approximately 4 pm. The question posed of Jim was regarding his comments on the proposed Abraham Glacier Resort development hindering or restricting movement of bears and large ungulates in the area. Jim responded that there is a large number of wildlife in the area and that it is a wildlife movement area."

From a June 13, 2003 letter from Cultural Facilities and Historical Resources Division, Alberta Community Development to the proponent: "The development plan incorporates lands that are considered to have high potential for the presence of archaeological resources, including, but not limited to areas adjacent to the Cline River, Whitegoat Creek and Whitegoat Lakes. The potential of development of this project to affect historical resources is considered to be high."

The letter goes on to state, "All bedrock exposures in the general area are fossiliferous to some extent. On this basis staff of the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology have recommended that an Historical Resources Impact Assessment for Palaeontological resources is necessary for this project to determine if there will be any impact to fossil resources."

According to a biophysical inventory done for the Whitegoat Lakes Development Node, there are significant constraints on development within the Development Node. The following statements come from this inventory:

"The Whitegoat Lakes wetland area is the single-most ecologically unique and sensitive system in the study area."

"Because of its location and easy access, this wetland area is judged to have unique interpretative and educational values and should, if possible, be protected from unrestrained development. For example, access should probably be restricted to narrow boardwalks carefully constructed for viewing and interpretative purposes. Development on adjoining upland areas

should be physically separated from the wetland by undisturbed, sufficiently wide buffer strips. Special consideration should be given to the design of any water and sewage facilities so that they do not negatively affect the natural hydrology of this valuable wetland.”

“Very few of the uplands ecosite areas are suitable for development facilities. Most have severe or very severe limitations for permanent buildings, sewage facilities and road locations...A no-development buffer strip should be provided...adjacent to the southern end of the Whitegoat Lakes wetland...In addition, some consideration should perhaps be given to protecting the small calcareous fen...at the southern end of the study area.”

“Development cannot be generally recommended for the moist alluvial fan area adjacent the highway.”

A July 22, 2003 letter from Clearwater County to the Hon. Lorne Taylor, Minister of Environment states: “It is the County’s opinion after reviewing the Screening Report that the Director is underestimating the magnitude of this proposal and the repercussions from the environmentalist community. The Natural Resources Conservation Board has been set up by the Government of Alberta to provide an impartial review process for projects that may affect the natural resources of the province. This Board has been given the mandate to determine if projects are in the public interest, taking into account their social, economic, and environmental effects. The NRCB review process is therefore ideally equipped to deal with complex issues such as the subject proposal and is far superior to any other process currently available to the County.”

The letter goes on to say, "It is the position of Clearwater County that many of the issues being raised by this proposal need to be assessed prior to being dealt with by the Municipal Planning Commission. The County does not have the personnel or the expertise to be dealing with environmental issues. This is an area that falls under provincial jurisdiction. Secondly, the County has no way of attaining information from the proponent as to their ability to finance this project, to sustain it through the early years of operation, and to provide medial personnel to staff it. The determination of project viability is essential before considering any form of approval. Furthermore, the County does not have the ability or the authority to deal with the impacts on adjacent lands which would be brought about by a development of this nature."