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Support County Decision to Deny Large Resort near Bighorn Wildland

The proponent of the Abraham Glacier Mineral Spa and Resort has announced that he will appeal the decision made by the County of Clearwater Municipal Planning Commission (MPC) to refuse a development permit for the resort. If successful in his appeal, the proponent will begin building the spa in the ecologically significant area of the Bighorn Wildland. Immediate action is required to help the County uphold its initial decision.

AWA supports low impact tourism development that does not compromise the ecological integrity of wilderness. Large-scale tourism developments are not compatible with wilderness values and experience. Development of the resort would place unacceptable pressure on the Bighorn Wildland and surrounding Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves. The proposed resort is not an appropriate development for the area, and the impacts on the environment and wildlife have not been adequately addressed.

BACKGROUND

In 2002, 1006335 Alberta Inc. (Alberta Inc.) submitted a proposal to develop the Abraham Glacier Mineral Spa and Resort, a 260-acre full service, self-contained health spa and resort. The resort was proposed for the Whitegoat Lakes Development Node along the David Thompson highway (Hwy 11) west of Nordegg and near the Bighorn Wildland. The proposed development would include a main lodge, self-contained cabins, restaurants, a cosmetic surgery clinic, pharmacy, and health spas.

On March 24, 2004, the MPC declined the proponent's application for the resort development permit. Among the reasons for refusing the application were the unsuitability of the site chosen for the resort and the fact that the applicant had not undertaken the necessary studies on the proposed sites. Alberta Inc. is now appealing the decision. The date of the Appeal Board hearing has yet to be determined.

Although the Whitegoat Development Node has been allocated for development, the proposed resort does not complement the wilderness characteristics of the Abraham Lakes area. The area for the resort is considered ecologically significant as it contains zones of prime protection, critical wildlife habitat (major wildlife movement corridor), and supports provincially identified Environmentally Significant Areas. The Node area is located near the Siffleur and White Goat Wilderness areas, the Kootenay Plains Ecological Reserve, and the Bighorn Wildland.

A project of this scale would disturb and displace wildlife populations and diminish the value of the wilderness that people come to see and experience. The potential cumulative impacts from the resort are not appropriate for this area, and have not been adequately explored since an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was not undertaken. This facility would be more appropriate in one of the surrounding gateway communities such as Nordegg or Rocky Mountain House. The community and other operators would still reap the economic benefits of the resort while maintaining the ecological integrity of the region.

ACTION

Your letters of concern are urgently needed to oppose the development of the Abraham Glacier Mineral Spa and Resort. Please send your letters to:

Clearwater County, Box 550 4340 - 47 Ave, Rocky Mountain House, AB, T4T 1A4

Fax: (780) 427-1349

Premier Ralph Klein, #307, 10800 - 97 Avenue, Edmonton, AB, T5K 2B7

Fax: 403-845-7330

Please forward copies of your letters to the Alberta Wilderness Association (awa.scp@shaw.ca). For more information contact Lara Smandych, AWA, at 403-283-2025 or visit www.AlbertaWilderness.ca

