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## **Parks Canada Rejection of Maligne Lodge in Jasper is Good News for Wildlife, Ecological Integrity; Development Concerns Remain**

In a decision announced on July 25, 2014, Parks Canada has rejected a 66-room luxury hotel proposed for the shores of Maligne Lake in Jasper National Park. The hotel proposed by Maligne Tours Ltd. would have been situated in the middle of important habitat for several threatened wild species, including grizzly bears, harlequin ducks, and the mountain caribou recently designated as endangered under Canada's Species at Risk Act. Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) applauds this decision, which recognizes the importance of the ecological integrity of our mountain parks. At the same time, we note that 13 other elements of the Maligne Tours proposal that were accepted by Parks Canada raise ongoing concerns about commercial developments in the park and may continue to threaten those wild species.

"It is reassuring to see that Parks Canada has listened to Canadians who have clearly said they do not support large-scale developments in critical wildlife habitat," says Sean Nichols, a conservation specialist with AWA, who goes on to note that "the prevailing theme in the feedback received by Parks Canada from the public was opposition to overnight accommodations, including the 66-room hotel and the tent cabins."

The 15 proposed tent cabins are one of 13 components of the Maligne Tours proposal that, unlike the hotel, were green-lighted for a more detailed design-level proposal. These 13 components also include fixed-structure elements, such as expanded retail and concession outlets in the existing day-use lodge; as well as those with smaller footprints, such as themed exhibits and a thatch-walled exploratory maze; and operations like canoe excursions and a water taxi service.

These approved components continue to raise concerns regarding the future of the valley, and the potential for later additions. It remains to be seen from the future design-level proposals what land may or may not need to be set aside to contain the tent cabins; AWA notes that the June 2010 Jasper National Park Management Plan stipulates that "No new land will be released for overnight commercial accommodation outside the community (of Jasper)." Also a concern is the additional traffic that may be seen along the Maligne Lake access road, which runs along a narrow valley causing potential disturbance to species including the Maligne caribou herd, currently with only four individuals.

AWA believes that the precedent set by the cabins is problematic, and as an organization remains opposed to commercial developments in Canadian national parks. Commercial operators do not have the same mandate to include conservation of ecological integrity as a priority. We encourage Parks Canada to carefully scrutinize any detailed design-level proposals received, and to keep in mind the extensive input they received from Canadians and the goals of Canada's National Conservation Plan, both cited as factors in today's commendable rejection of the luxury hotel.

### **For more information:**

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