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Fortress Ski Hill Approved to Truck Mountain Water to Calgary

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) has learned that the Alberta government recently granted approval to Fortress Mountain ski hill to remove 50 million liters per year of water from Kananaskis country and truck it to a Calgary water bottling facility to sell as ‘pure’ mountain water. AWA strongly opposes this water use and calls on Albertans to convey their concerns to the government and Fortress ski hill.

“Permitting the driving of thousands of truckloads of mountain stream water each year out of Kananaskis to Calgary is a very poor water re-allocation decision,” says Carolyn Campbell, AWA conservation specialist. “The 50 million liters of water that Fortress clearly doesn’t need for its ski business should be left in Kananaskis country. Fortress ski hill should have the highest water conservation practices possible given its privileged position surrounded by Alberta mountain parks. Trucking and selling mountain water definitely doesn’t meet that standard.”

Fortress ski hill is permitted to withdraw water for its ski business from a stream that flows into Galatea Creek, which in turn flows into Kananaskis River and the Bow River. One of the bizarre aspects of this proposal is that Fortress ski hill has been approved to truck 50 million liters of water to Calgary, where the water already naturally flows whilst providing multiple benefits along its route.

Fortress confirmed in a July 2019 public letter that this trucked bottled water, will be marketed for its ‘purity’. Existing municipal water supplies are of very high quality, whereas this bottled water will actually be worse for the environment. Its higher impacts include:

- 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 is already flowing 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 requires Fortress to stop diverting water when it is below 45% of the natural flow of the mountain stream. This is a weak limit for two reasons: 45% applied to headwaters generally is far too low to avoid ecological damage; and a headwaters stream where flows may be strong one year 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 rivers. The Bow River’s water is already over-allocated for meeting instream environmental needs, the Bow’s average annual flow rates are in decline, and Albertans owe it to future generations to choose much more sustainable uses of energy and water.

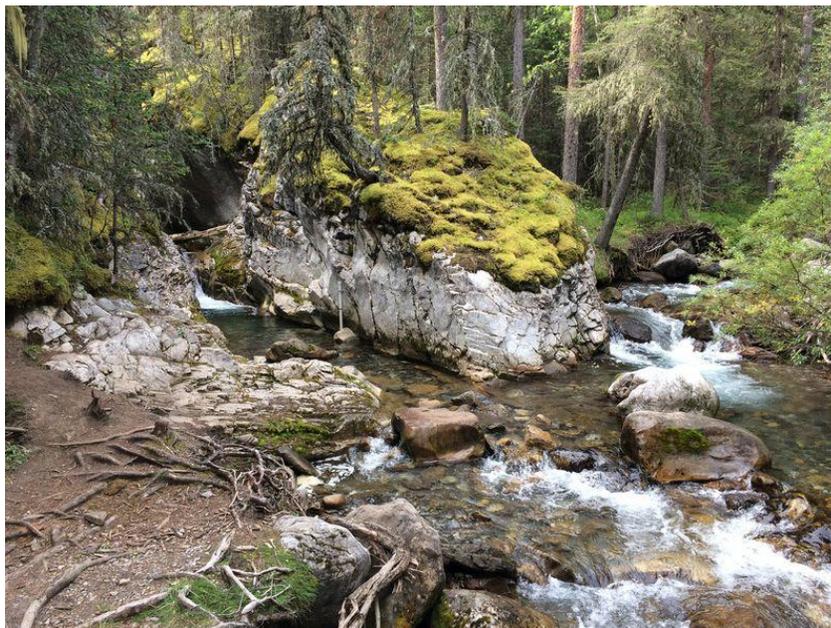




Alberta Wilderness Association asks concerned Albertans to oppose this water use by respectfully writing Fortress ski hill (thomas.heath@skifortress.com), the Alberta Minister of Environment and Parks (AEP.Minister@gov.ab.ca), and their MLA (https://www.assembly.ab.ca/net/index.aspx?p=mla_home).

For more information:

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Galatea Creek, Spray Valley Provincial Park, Kananaskis Country. Photo: Alberta Wilderness Association.

