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Glacier Resorts travesty leaves taxpayers on the hook—who knew? Public investigation bears strange fruit as silt, gravel, sewage and gas spills into Farnham Creek

Invermere, B.C. —A year and a half ago, Glacier Resorts Ltd. started punching a road through the alpine to access what public groups are calling a “dubious tenure” to parts of the Farnham Glacier, located 67 kilometres into the Invermere backcountry.

The action has left the area with considerable environmental damage. Members of the public have noted several infractions in the contested area—each caused by actions taken by Glacier Resorts and/or its contractors.

Public watchdogs have documented a long-term diesel spill and an outhouse that has “melted” into the creek bed, among other damages. The proponent’s road—constructed without permit and not engineered to withstand alpine erosion—has caused hundreds of cubic metres of silt and gravel to wash across the alpine and into Farnham Creek. In addition, the temporary access road to the tenure has not been controlled—the gate has been repeatedly left open, allowing uncontrolled ORV access to the critical grizzly and goat habitat in alpine of Farnham Creek.

“If Glacier Resorts cannot even manage a temporary tenure without environmental destruction, how can they be expected to run a mega-resort?” asked Dave Quinn, Wildsight’s Purcells program manager.

Quinn said that the public has been forced to investigate these damages: “There seems to be insufficient government resources—and insufficient will—to effectively monitor remote tenures like this. It has taken three months and many letters for the Ministry of Environment to launch a formal investigation into it, during which time the environmental degradation has continued unabated.”

Arnor Larson, a local mountain guide, decided to look into what was happening in the area and sent several letters to ministers Kevin Krueger and Barry Penner. Larson wanted to know how the tenure came to be awarded with no public notice and how the damage will be addressed.

What he learned was disturbing.

“The License of Occupation given to Glacier Resorts clearly states they are responsible for deactivating and blocking access on their temporary road at the end of every season—but this never happened,” Larson said. “The gate is removed and people just haul the blocks out of the way or remove the gate for access.”

The worst part, according to Larson and Quinn, is that Glacier Resorts’ arrangement with the Province stipulates a meagre yearly “rental fee” of just \$500 dollars for 1,415 hectares of land—with no security deposit at all.

“This drop-in-the-bucket fee for the use of Crown Land doesn’t cover even one inspection trip by the Province to this remote tenure—and there is no security funding to ensure that the environment is looked after if the proponent causes damage to Crown lands, as has happened in this case,” Quinn said.

“How are we supposed to believe Glacier Resorts will be able to manage 6,000 hectares of melting glaciers in the heart of the Purcells safely—when they can’t even handle the basics like outhouses and road building?”

Quinn and Larson take cold comfort that the Province of B.C. is now investigating the environmental damages: “The investigation is done wholly at the expense of taxpayers,” Quinn said.

“This proponent has again revealed a lack of respect for public process and the environment,” Quinn said. “For twenty years, Glacier Resorts did not even bother to apply to the RDEK for rezoning that would have allowed public process—instead, they quietly negotiated a tenure on Farnham Glacier in 2007 with no public process or notice, and then started building a road and ski lift in the alpine in summer 2008, again with no authorization we know of, no zoning permits, and no public notice.

“That leaves the public with no reason to believe that the wilderness, watersheds and wildlife of the upper Jumbo Valley will be stewarded as a ‘green’ destination by these developers. What’s more, the residents—whose voices were voted into silence by the RDEK—are on the hook to pay for damages the developer is already causing to this area.”

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About Wildsight

Wildsight works locally, regionally and globally to protect biodiversity and encourage sustainable communities in Canada's Columbia and southern Rocky Mountain region. This area is internationally recognized as a keystone to conservation in western North America. For more information, please visit <http://www.wildsight.ca>

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