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For Immediate Release

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River diversion proposal gets shelved a second time

Axor's application for a Glacier-Howser IPP suspended by Province for insufficient data

Invermere, B.C.: The controversial Glacier-Howser independent power proposal, that would divert four Kootenay creeks and build transmission lines and roads through 92 kilometres of Kootenay wilderness, has been suspended by the B.C. Environmental Assessment Office—for a second time.

Citing lack of data on fisheries and habitat impacts, the EA office suspended the application made by Axor Group Inc. Axor failed to provide sufficient data evaluating the predicted changes to physical habitat resulting from the diversion of water. As well, the Quebec corporation failed to provide a report evaluating the impacts to fish, or to provide a fish and fish habitat compensation plan.

“This is good news for fish habitat and wilderness in the Kootenays,” said Dave Quinn, Wildsight’s Purcells program manager. “The EA office suspended the application process, clearly stating that the applicant has not met the basic requirements for preventing impacts to this irreplaceable and invaluable fishery.

“This decision supports what people in the Kootenays have known all along—Glacier-Howser is the wrong project in the wrong valley.”

Quinn said that even due diligence in data collection would not have made this river diversion project acceptable. “The reality is, no matter how much data is gathered, there is no way to divert major creeks and build nearly 100 kilometres of transmission line through wilderness areas and not inflict unacceptable impacts on fishery values and wilderness values.”

Roughly 90 per cent of over 1,000 submissions made by the public to the EA office opposed the proposal. In addition, several organizations and agencies, such as the Regional District of East Kootenay and Fisheries and Oceans Canada, deemed the potential impacts of the project to fish and fish habitat to be unacceptable.

The suspension is déjà vu for Axor, who tried previously to secure an IPP tenure from the Province. The Province rejected this initial application in 2008, but Axor came back earlier this year with a revision.

“Axor’s application was rejected the first time because it did not meet its own terms of reference,” Quinn said. “And this time, it has left out the very values that the public is most concerned about: fish, fish habitat and wilderness.”

Quinn noted that, while conservation groups applaud the suspension as being good for fish, good for grizzlies and good for wilderness in B.C., this turn of events highlights some flaws in the EA process.

“There is no legislation that allows the EA to reject a bad proposal like this outright,” he said. “Instead, the EA is faced with having to send proposals ‘back to the drawing board’ repeatedly.

“A suspension is the toughest measure the EA can take to disapprove an application. We hope, though, that this suspension will finally render an ill-planned, potentially devastating river diversion project ‘dead in the water.’”

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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 www.wildsight.ca.

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