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Sparwood mayor wants Jumbo out of RDEK hands

Director Wilks wants district to foist Jumbo decision back to Province; “resort municipality”

Invermere and Cranbrook, B.C. — Regional District of East Kootenay Director David Wilks will drop a “Jumbo” bomb at next Friday’s RDEK board meeting, in the form of a resolution designed to send the Jumbo decision back to Victoria. This is the second attempt by Wilks to evade a local decision with input from residents of the region. His previous attempt failed when directors voted overwhelmingly in favour of keeping the decision on the Jumbo development in the region.

If the RDEK directors vote in favour of Wilks’ resolution this time, it will have long-term ramifications for the Jumbo Valley and for the democratic process in the East Kootenay.

“Wilks is asking the RDEK to recommend that the Province turn Jumbo into a ‘mountain resort municipality,’” said John Bergenske, Wildsight’s executive director.

“If the RDEK decides to recommend this, it would be like saying: ‘Here—take this decision from us, we don’t want it. . .’ Fortunately, the RDEK has a fair track record of not just handing off controversial issues, so Wildsight is hopeful that the resolution will be soundly defeated.”

Jumbo Glacier Resort has been the single most-talked-about land-use issue in the East Kootenay for nearly two decades. A number of third-party polls, government-sponsored plebiscites and other public input have shown there is a consistent majority of residents in favour of keeping Jumbo wild.

Bergenske wondered why Wilks, who is also mayor of Sparwood, would see the need to march the RDEK directors forward on the issue in this way.

“It’s odd that a director from the Elk Valley is introducing a motion on a development that’s at the other end of the region and that has basically zero direct influence on his community—but that does have huge impacts on the Columbia Valley and on the region’s environment,” Bergenske said.

Bergenske said that, so far, the RDEK hasn’t received the formal request from the resort developers to rezone the area. “In other words, there’s no reason to be dealing with the issue until there’s a rezoning application,” he said. “And due process requires the rezoning to go ahead with full participation of local residents.”

So, the vote facing RDEK directors at the August 7 board meeting in Cranbrook is a crucial one.

“If Wilks’ resolution were, by some horrible fluke of apathy, to pass,” Bergenske said, “It would take people in the East Kootenay right out of the equation. Asking the Province to make Jumbo a ‘resort municipality’ is basically asking the RDEK to abdicate on local land-use decision making — which is one of its most important roles.

“This action would remove people’s ability to decide the fate of where they live,” Bergenske said. “We are hoping that RDEK directors will vote with their consciences, not just for the sake of expedience.”

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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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