

27th of January, 2009

Arthur DeJong
Whistler Mountain Planning & Environmental Resource Manager
Whistler Blackcomb Mountains
4545 Blackcomb Way, Whistler BC, Canada VoN 1B4.

Dear Mr. DeJong:

As avid outdoor enthusiasts, we are writing to register our disappointment over Whistler-Blackcomb's decision to partner with Ledcor in building the \$20 Million Fitzsimmons Creek Run-of-River Hydroelectric Project (see Powered by Water on page 32 of Whistler Blackcomb Magazine).¹ We ask that Whistler Blackcomb dissolve this partnership and pursue a different form of renewable energy that will have less impact on the environment and on recreational and community uses of this river system. Instead of pursuing this project, we ask that Whistler-Blackcomb work with environmental, river, recreation and other local groups and use its position and resources to become a vocal leader in protecting the beautiful and outstanding rivers and recreational resources available in British Columbia.

The issue is not only the environmental, economic and recreational impacts of this particular project (which remain a concern), but also the cumulative impacts of the many new hydroelectric projects on rivers throughout British Columbia (more than six hundred water license applications). A significant number of those are proposed, or under construction in the Sea to Sky Corridor between Squamish and Pemberton. Many skiers and boarders also enjoy other outdoor pursuits including paddling, climbing, fishing and hiking along the rivers in British Columbia. All of these recreational forms are endangered by these projects, either through site-specific impacts, lack of regional planning,² or cumulatively by overdevelopment of river resources.

Impacts from Run-of-River Projects

Recreational and other users have already lost the aesthetic and wilderness values along the Ashlu, Brandywine, Rutherford and Miller Creeks (two of which are Ledcor projects and examples of how run-of-river projects are NOT green and renewable from our perspective). We face a project nearly three-times the size of the Ashlu on the nearby Ryan River, and face additional projects on Furry and Siwash Creek. Outside the Sea to Sky Corridor, we are in jeopardy of losing the Pitt, Howser, Glacier, and many other rivers and creeks to new hydropower projects. Now, we are losing the recreational and scenic benefits of Fitzsimmons creek where skiers skin alongside the creek on their way to Singing Bridge and the Spearhead Traverse, and where paddlers occasionally run the creek when sufficient flows are available.

¹ http://www.whistlerblackcomb.com/media/news/season_2008-09/080912.htm

² The Government has no existing comprehensive or regional plan. Because of this, no one knows how many projects may be built, where they may be built, and no are is limits for development.

And while the Fitzsimmons project may have a smaller footprint than a number of other projects in this area, the full impact remain unknown, since this 7.5 MW project does not require an environmental assessment. . This project still breaks the waterway in two, dewater a significant portion of the creek, and affects navigation and public passage alongside the creek. It also adversely affects the scenic view of this watershed nestled between Whistler and Blackcomb mountains. Moreover it will contribute to the cumulative impact of other projects in the region

Climate Change

For all of us involved in winter sports, climate change is of key concern.³ However, it is hard to understand how this project will help Whistler Blackcomb address this pressing issue?

While dams generally are not associated with air pollution, they are a significant source of water pollution.⁴ And small run-of-river dams like Fitzsimmons Creek won't contribute much to solving global warming. The effects of global warming, such as reduced instream flow, increased flood events, and possible conflict over water resources, will negatively impact all hydropower dams in the future. In addition, the impacts on rivers from dams and global warming are disturbingly similar. In many areas, we expect that both will:

- Destroy resiliency by disturbing habitats and altering the amount and timing of stream flows
- Increase water temperature
- Decrease water quality & quantity
- Reduce fish migration
- Cause species extinction

Why build new hydropower dams that have definite and certain environmental impacts for a minor reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and a highly uncertain contribution to reducing the environmental impacts of climate change globally? Instead, we would recommend that Whistler Blackcomb increase its already successful energy conservation efforts to a level that would both eliminate the need for this project and “achieve a net-zero footprint.”

Project Economics

Whistler Blackcomb has said that the project will “... produce enough electricity to match the total annual energy consumption of the ski resort's winter and summer operations, including the 36 ski lifts, 17 restaurants, 269 snowguns and all the other buildings and services.” However, details supporting this claim are sketchy. For

³ “Climate change is the number one issue for a ski resort,” said Arthur DeJong, <http://solartoday.wordpress.com/2008/09/15/hydro-project-to-offset-whistler-olympic-energy-needs/>

⁴ Pollution from altering the temperature and chemical make up of water, harm to the biological integrity of river systems, and by changing the physical presence of water in the river.

instance, there is little information on how this creek, which runs only a few months per year, will provide enough energy to offset this level of energy consumption.⁵ And even if this were to match the ski area's annual use of electricity, it will not directly offset that consumption, as the creek is generally frozen, buried, and barely flowing during the winter season when most of the energy is required. Therefore, to provide necessary power, electricity must be obtained from other sources during the winter time (potentially non-renewable power imported from Alberta's coal plants). Further, the power produced will not be available directly to Whistler-Blackcomb, but will be sold under contract to BC Hydro and added to the general grid. Finally, climate change may have a significant effect in reducing the volume and timing of water flowing in the river in future years. This, in turn, may call in to question the wisdom of investing \$20 million in a project whose economic value may decrease significantly over time.

Conclusion

First, we would ask that Whistler Blackcomb dissolve its partnership with Ledcor, due to the contractor's problematic environmental track record. In our view, Ledcor's projects are negatively impacting many outstanding recreational rivers in British Columbia. Given the widespread community opposition to its projects, the company may not be the best choice for a sustainable partnership.

Second, we ask that Whistler Blackcomb work with the BC Creeks Protection Society and members of the BC Rivers Alliance to become a leader in protecting the river and recreational resources available in British Columbia. Doing so would involve steps such as:

- Consult with environmental and recreational groups in future planning that involves Fitzsimmons Creek or other rivers in the area.
- Recognize that that hydroelectric power projects may not be either sustainable or green and that they frequently have significant, adverse environmental impacts.
- Work with recreational groups to assure full public access to the creek.
- Create a watershed advisory group (including environmental and recreational stakeholders) for future decision making and management of this project after construction has been completed.
- Actively advocate guaranteed year-round appropriate flows in the bypass area with transparent public monitoring.
- Commit Whistler Blackcomb resources (outreach, PR, and political and economic leadership) to educating the public on the problems of run-of-river or other hydropower dams, and advocating renewable energy that does not decimate rivers and recreational areas.

Thank you for considering our request.

Sincerely,

⁵ Comparing energy and consumption would require knowing the seasonal flow forecasts for Fitzsimmons as well as the seasonal power projection.

Jakub Drnec, MSc, Director, BC Creek Protection Society, 4145 Borden Street, Victoria, BC
(250) 382 3499, jakub@bc-creeks.org

Craig Orr, PhD, Executive Director, Watershed Watch Salmon Society

Thomas O'Keefe, PhD, Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director, American Whitewater

Andrew Mylly, Director, President Whitewater Division, Canoe Kayak BC

Carl Jacks, President, Borderline Boaters Kayak Club, Endangered Creeks Expedition
Team Paddler

John Calvert , Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University

Marjorie Griffin Cohen, Professor, Political Science/Women's Studies, Simon Fraser
University

Cc: Whistler Mayor Ken Melamed
David Lede, Chairman & CEO, Ledcor Group of Companies
Dave Brownlie, President and Chief Operating Officer, Whistler Blackcomb
Mountain Resorts Limited
[Brian Collins](#), President of Intrawest