

Squamish project sent back for review

Garibaldi at Squamish denied environmental certificate, at least for now

By Derrick Penner, Vancouver Sun June 12, 2010

Proponents of a major new ski resort outside Squamish have failed to answer key questions about environmental risks in their application for a permit and will have to conduct a full project review, the provincial government announced Friday.

Environment Minister Barry Penner and Tourism Minister Kevin Krueger made the decision to deny Garibaldi at Squamish Inc.'s application for an environmental assessment certificate for its long-sought proposal after the Environmental Assessment Office determined it had not seen enough information about its plans to use water from Brohm Creek and build dams to store it without risking fish habitat, and had incomplete information on the project's potential impact on wildlife and vegetation.

"The ball is in the proponent's court," Penner said. "If they do not provide us with the information required, the project will not go ahead. If they do, we'll take another look at this project."

Garibaldi at Squamish Inc. is proposing to build a multibillion-dollar all-season resort with 123 ski runs, two golf courses, and capacity for almost 22,000 beds on Brohm Ridge, 15 kilometres north of Squamish.

Two well-known B.C. families, the Gaglardis and the Aquilinis, are the leading proponents of the project.

The company took the position it had provided the EAO with enough information and had sought a certificate from Penner and Krueger that would have been conditional upon satisfying environmental concerns during the permitting process for the resort.

Proponents have been working on the project since 1987, and it has been in the Environmental Assessment process since 1997 in some form or other.

The plan has proved controversial because of its potential impact on Brohm Creek, an important steelhead trout stream.

In an interview, Penner said he and Krueger believed granting the permit "would have undermined the environmental assessment process."

"There's a few holes to be filled in terms of information, and it's an open question, if they did provide that information, it may indicate the risks of adverse impacts are too great [to approve

the project]," Penner said. "But we don't know that, because we weren't provided that information."

A statement from David Negrin, president of Garibaldi at Squamish, said the company remains "committed to ensuring that [the project] goes ahead with all of the environmental aspects in mind, and we'll be working with the province to provide additional details that reinforce that commitment."

Negrin added that the project as a whole would be a "unique development [that] will be a major economic and tourism addition to the region."

Penner said the group's baseline information on wildlife and habitat was not adequate to determine what impact the development might have on some wildlife species at risk -- including the spotted owl, northern goshawk, coastal tailed frog and red-legged frog.

Penner added that he has particular concerns about the project's potential impact on Brohm Creek.

The proponent has just one year of flow data for the creek, but the EAO wants to see at least three years.

Environmental groups that have opposed the Garibaldi project welcomed Friday's decision.

"I think it was a wise decision to turn this down until they have more information," Craig Orr, executive director of the group Watershed Watch Salmon Society, said.

Orr added that he fears the project will still go ahead, even though he believes it "poses significant threats on some fairly important natural habitat."

Wolfgang Richter, vice-chairman of the company's board of directors, said it is in the developer's interest to proceed without damaging the environment, and he sees the environmental concerns more as technical challenges than problems.

He added that it is important not to lose sight of the project's potential economic impact, including more than 13,000 person-years' worth of construction work and \$2 billion in local purchasing over the 20 years it will take to build it.

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