

# FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST REVEALS BIASED GOVERNMENT PROCESS FOR THE PROPOSED ZINCTON RESORT

The Valhalla Wilderness Society is in the process of reviewing 1,050 pages of government correspondence regarding the All Seasons Resort proposed for Zincton by David Harley. Despite the great expenditure of time and money required to request documents under the *Freedom of Information Act*, many of the more recent pages tell us nothing because they are massively redacted. (The government must have an awfully lot to hide). Fortunately the documents do contain a small amount of information that's important, given that so little information about the government review has been publicly available since the Environmental Assessment Office rejected a request by a large number of people and organizations for an Environmental Assessment of the project.

Eight months have gone by since BC's Environmental Assessment Office (EAO) issued its shocking decision rejecting an application by Wildsight and the Sinixt Confederacy to designate the proposed resort of Zincton Farms, Ltd. as eligible for and Environmental Assessment (EA). An EA would have been automatic if the number of accommodations at the proposed Resort had been over 2,000 bed units. However, Zincton Farms applied for 1,700 bed units

The *Environmental Assessment Act* does provide a process by which a smaller proposal can be eligible for an EA. The Reasons for Decision by the EAO admitted that the Zincton project was eligible. Nevertheless, it rejected the application on the sole basis that the Mountain Resorts Branch (MRB) of the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sports could just as well evaluate the environmental impacts of the project.

Yet this same Mountain Resorts Branch appears to have a conflict of interest because its mandate is literally to promote the development of All Seasons Resorts. How can the MRB be an independent assessor when it's a party in interest?

The emails obtained through the *Freedom of Information Act* show that the MRB process allows the terms of an application to be changed in the Master Plan phase of the process, which occurs after the application has been approved and an agreement with the proponent has been signed. The EAO and the MRB both knew that the number of beds might change after the contract was signed:

"Zincton communicated that it planned to be below 1700 BU for the two projects combined (CRA and private lands) but that the Proponent would not have a formal BU number for the private lands until the Master Planning process."

The Zincton developer's reports have made no secret of their intention to expand the project in the future, if the initial application is approved.

## Scathing assessment by the Ministry of Transportation and Transit (MOTT)

In 2020 MOTT informed the proponent that the area of the proposal may be subject to flooding, erosion, landslides or avalanches. It listed extensive studies by professional engineers and geologists that were lacking in the assessment of the proponent's own consultants. MOTT also expressed concern that the proposed ski resort would make people prone to the danger of the many avalanches that come down on Highway 31A every year. MOTT conducts yearly bombing of the start

zones to make the highway safer for winter travel. It recently closed off the whole side of the mountain, part of Zincton's ski proposal development, to the public in winter due to this risk.

Since that 2020 letter by MOTT, VWS has seen no evidence of the engineering and geological studies that MOTT required. Instead, the Freedom of Information (FOI) documents show that by September 2024 there was an Agreement in Principle between MOTT and Zincton Lifts, Ltd. to transfer some of the avalanche control functions from the government to Zincton Lifts. MOTT set down eight conditions to which Zincton must agree, in return for MOTT approving the application. Zincton Lifts agreed, but the Agreement is a farce, given that MOTT reserves the prerogative to revise the wording of the conditions after the project has been approved by the MRB.

## RDCK: Another scathing 2025 review

FOI documents include a letter from the Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK) to the provincial ministry. The RDCK reminded the government that it supported the request for an Environmental Assessment. And further:

"In the RDCK's 2021 response to the MRB, it requested a cumulative effects study, socio-economic impact assessment and environmental overview third party review." Based on the Proponent's and the MRB's websites, the RDCK reviewer stated: "it is apparent that none of these studies have been done."

The new village to be built on Mr. Harley's private land is envisioned to have approximately 340 residential lots composed of cabins, chalets and residences. The decision-maker for the private land is the RDCK working in collaboration with the MOTT. According to the FOI documents, an amendment to the RDCK Official Community Plan may be possible to allow the development. The current and long-standing OCP objects to fragmentation of the area's wildlife corridors.

By February of 2025, a government email stated that proponent David Harley had met the Mayors of Kaslo, New Den-



Amber Peters

ver, Silverton and Nakusp, and that they were all "supportive", and there was "generally good" local support. Whether this was true is highly questionable.

## The Most Major Concerns

The total development will bring major disruption to soil, vegetation, and hydrology. Our government and our residents have seen what weather extremes caused by climate change have brought. New Denver straddles Carpenter Creek, into which any debris torrents will empty, to travel with great force downstream to our village and our lake. It is a huge and highly irresponsible risk to which government approval of the resort would expose our residents.

Two of the area's species at risk, grizzly bears and wolverines, will likely abandon the area or get killed due to human conflicts or road accidents. All the effort expended to reduce the road mortality of Western Toads will be for naught.

Further, a new village between New Denver and Kaslo could put enormous pressure on our hospital and our housing availability. Developments such as Zincton have a track record across the BC of causing a steep divide between an influx of rich vacationers and second-home buyers, versus long-time residents unable to afford sky-rocketing property taxes and low-paying ski resort jobs.

The public has been kept in the dark for too long, and this generates a feeling that the threat of the proposed Zincton Resort is gone. This situation is set up for a shock announcement approving the project one day, so all those opposing the resort must renew their writing of letters to government.

**Please write letters to:  
Mountain Resorts Branch  
510-175 2nd Ave,  
Kamloops, BC V2C 5W1  
Fax: 250-371-3942**

**Submitted by:  
Valhalla Wilderness Society**



Gary Diers

The rare white grizzlies of Goat Range Provincial Park and surrounding area are seriously imperilled by the plan for a backcountry lodge on the slopes of London Ridge.