

Handout at Miner's Hall Community Meeting, December, 2003

OLD GLORY : Snocat Skiing Proposed – Again!

Reasons Why the Application Should be Opposed

Application:

(We recommend you review the application for your own full understanding)}

- 1) Tenure on 4,951 hectares – entire Old Glory area bounded roughly by: Hwy 3B to Sheep Creek & Mt. Kirkup to Strawberry Flats; for Snocat tours with up to 2 large Snocat machines, each able to carry up to 16 (average 8) guests on 6 days per week and 6 to 8 runs per day for skiers and snowboarders, with tours for snowshoers.
- 2) Term: 10 years

The Applicant claims:

- Not exclusive – public can still use the area as they always have.
- More people able to enjoy the area – even those “of the average level of fitness”.
- Economy boost & diversification {Jobs: staff 2; drivers 3 & guides 4; no est. of employment hours per year}
- No buildings or structures required in area.
- Risk mitigation - Rossland & Rivervale/Oasis watersheds, and wildlife & fauna (the Application claims there are few issues and that these can be mitigated).
- Some preference in standby rates for local residents (within 100km).

Note: The term “Old Glory area” herein means the extent of the land area set out in the Application. This pretty much exactly matches that in the Nancy Greene Highland Forest plan.

Response by Friends of the Rossland Range :

- A) **Why are we having to deal with this again?**

The Old Glory area has long been well known as a special place within the Rossland area, Greater Trail and the Kootenays. This has been confirmed by 40 years, or so, of planning to protect the values.

- The Rossland Range stands alone with 9 peaks.
- The Red Mountain Ski Area tenure occupies approximately the south half.
- The Snocat proposed tenure would occupy approximately the north half.
- The Red Mountain Ski Area tenure provides for intensive ski hill development. It was supported and approved on the basis that the north half of the Rossland Range would, in contrast, be for low impact, non-motorized use - being for access on foot into a natural setting. It was also recognized this would offer an alternative experience and be a benefit to the adjacent ski hill business.
- The Old Glory area is a last small “island” of natural mountain terrain (about 5,000 hectares) in a “vast sea” of lands to the north, south, east and west for motorized (and major ski area) use. As an example, just those lands nearby, to the east of Hwy 3B and to the north of Hwy 3, total in the order of 30,000 to 40,000 hectares with mountains of similar size and shape to those in the Old Glory area – all open to motorized use.
- Protection of the values in the Old Glory area was begun with establishment of the Nancy Greene Recreation Area. After this status was changed, protection continued through the Nancy Greene Highland Forest Plan administered by the Forestry. The current plan was developed with public consultation in 1997. This plan is founded on non-motorized activity, and provides for some logging in a manner that is consistent with the overall objectives. Most recently, the process leading to the Red Mountain Ski Area master plan two years ago confirmed these principles. A key purpose has always been to maintain a reasonable balance between ‘developed/motorized’ and ‘natural’ experiences in the Rossland Range .

B) Sharing of the Old Glory area between foot and motorized access (ie: the idea that the Snocat tour operations can intermingle with activities by persons on foot) is simply not possible.

The Snocat tour operations (and the additional public motorized activity that will inevitably come with it) will completely overwhelm and dominate the natural setting itself - winter and summer - due to:

- i) many kilometers of snow road corridors being necessary along the ridges and into the basins. These will require a great amount of tree-cutting to create ‘powerline cuts’ 7 to 10 meters in width for the roads on the snow;

ii) obstacles where snow roads cut across otherwise good runs for skiers on foot, and across summer trails;

iii) major visual impacts in the existing natural setting – especially in summer;

iv) large Snocat machines (each twice the width and length of an average automobile) moving up & down and back & forth through the area all day as per the operating plan set out in the Application;

v) noise and smell (which lingers in the cold air);

vi) safety concerns with large machines in contact with unrelated persons on foot;

vi) Snocat guests being concentrated in large groups, and who will quickly exhaust most of the terrain;

vii) the main ridge snow road being on top of, or immediately adjacent to, ¼ of the 30 kilometer summer/winter Record-Plewman Ridge Trail. This trail is incorporated in the Forestry management plan (File#2434). This trail has had significant expenditures made on it, and has been, and continues to be worked on by many persons and groups including the Horseman's Society, the Forestry 'Metis' crew and general volunteers. It is now within the Kootenay Columbia Trails Society master plan and the subject of a current SICEAI grant application; and most importantly

viii) easy public motorized access, literally on the outskirts of Rossland, winter and summer, using many types of vehicles that will result in enormous loss of the natural setting and damage to wildlife habitat. It will not be possible to control this public motorized access.

C) The Old Glory area is of exceptional value for access on foot into the natural alpine terrain, due to:

i) easy access off a provincial highway at a relatively high elevation within minutes from Rossland, and within an hour from all other cities in the region;

ii)) the attractive summits and ridges in the Old Glory area being able to be reached within a few hours by the average hiker from the highway; and

iii) it being one of only three such easily accessible backcountry sites in the Kootenays; the others being (a) at the Salmo-Creston Summit, and (b) above the Whitewater Ski Area. (Note: the Old Glory area is the most accessible and the most comfortable of these for the average hiker).

D) In contrast, for Snocat tours, many sites are available in the Kootenays (in locations that are not disturbed by public motorized activities, or in significant

conflict with persons on foot). Many Snocat tour operations have been established – most within an hour, or so drive of Rossland. Many more such Snocat operations can be accommodated in these other areas that are larger with terrain, and alpine settings that are much suited to this type of commercial activity.

- E) The area is core year round grizzly bear habitat supporting at least two denning females. This population of bears is officially threatened. It is the last such undisturbed terrain in the vicinity of Rossland. It is critical that it continue undisturbed with no roads. A Snocat operation (and the associated public motorized activity) would disrupt this denning area due to noise, smell, movement of many vehicles, and the roads required for the Snocats. Spring and summer habitat will be harmed due to snow compaction and disruption of fragile soil and vegetation (for more detailed information, contact Barry Williscroft – see page 3).
- F) A specific Snocat operations tenure might have legal provisions that exclude commercial operations by others without the agreement of the Applicant. Further, notwithstanding the initial arrangements, such a tenure might, someday, result in restrictions in public access to the area.

- G) Other issues that must be addressed:

watershed for Rossland and Rivervale, and congestion along a high-speed (100 kph) stretch of provincial highway due to trucks, trailers and vans adding to an already difficult situation; and it would seem probable that a garage will ultimately be required for storage of the high-value, large Snocat machines.

- H) The business plan of the Snocat operation is of fundamental concern. This is because the terrain is not sufficiently large for such a purpose, snow conditions are generally not good over most of the terrain most of the time (only good intermittently for brief periods) and the impact of public motorized access is likely to be a major problem. The business could well devolve to a partial operation at best with marginal economic benefits for the community, but having had irreversible devastating impacts on the Old Glory area for its traditional uses.
- I) The proposed Snocat operation is very close to Rossland on lands that are partly within the City of Rossland and that are already well used.
- J) The Friends of the Rossland Ranges propose an “Alternative Approach”:

Basic principles of this would be that commercial activity is important for the future of Rossland, Greater Trail and the Kootenays, and that the natural setting of the Old Glory area can support commercial activity that is compatible with continued, traditional public use. Further objectives would be to maintain the lifestyle that is attracting so many people (such as the Applicant’s family) to move to and to invest in this area, and to attract tourists.

Commercial activity would be promoted and facilitated in the Old Glory area, subject to it being based on hiking access, the natural setting and the wildlife. We are prepared to work to establish a tenure that would be an 'umbrella' to accommodate many different small business enterprises including guiding for skiing, snowboarding and snow-shoeing, outdoor educational programs and youth programs; and doing this in a manner that eases the initial set-up and ongoing challenges of such small businesses and that provides some joint marketing.

We are convinced that such commercial activities will provide greater economic benefit and diversity than a Snocat operation, and with much greater certainty of success. This plan is realistic - as with heli-skiing and Snocat skiing, the interest in backcountry hiking experiences is increasing dramatically and becoming mainstream.

Most importantly, this approach would enable the Old Glory area to remain attractive to persons of all ages, abilities, a great variety of interests and economic standing.

In contrast, the Snocat operation would effectively restrict use to a select few with most having to be expert skiers or snowboarders, and all well-off financially.

K) The Old Glory area has been, and is utilized extensively and is highly valued in its natural state by residents of Rossland, Greater Trail and the entire Kootenay region. It is part of our heritage and culture. The Old Glory hike has been a 'rite-of-passage' for young people growing up in the area for most of the past hundred years. Our hope is that this experience will be able to continue for at least the next hundred years.

The Old Glory Alpine Area is a local treasure. We must invest it wisely.

We are at a critical point.

Deadline for public input: January 8th, 2004 – Submit your views (mail is best, but at least an e-mail) to:

Land & Water British Columbia (LWBC), {Att'n: Robin Fawcett}, 1902 Theatre Road, Cranbrook, B.C. V1C7G1 Application # 4404174 Phone: (250)-426-1766
lwbc.cranbrook@victoria1.gov.bc.ca
City Council

MLA's Sandy Santori (Trail) & Blair Sufferdine (Nelson) Ministries:

- Forestry: (hold the Nancy Greene Highland Forest Plan):

Ministry of Forests, Arrow/Boundary Forest District, {Att'n: Ted Evans}, Castlegar, B.C. (250)-365-8600 or 8680 Ted.Evans@gems8.gov.bc.ca

- Wildlife: Fish & Wildlife in Nelson, B.C. {Att'n: Guy Woods} (250)-354-6341

Guy.Woods@gems4.gov.bc.ca

- Water: Ministry of Land, Water & Air Protection, #401 333 Victoria St, Nelson, B.C. V1C 4K3 (250)-354-6333
- Planning: Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, {Att'n: Steve Flett}, Nelson (250)-354-6379
Steve.Flett@gems8.gov.bc.ca (overall government planning; eg: this has been done for Golden area backcountry)

Friends of the Rossland Range is an informal 'Committee' open to all. More 'Friends' will help to support any submissions we may develop as a group (in addition to the much more important individual letters and e-mails).

Contact any of the following to be included as a 'Friend'; or, to discuss/comment upon any of the points herein.

Ken Holmes (362-7723) rkholmes@telus.net

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Kim Deane (362-5648) kdeane@direct.ca