



February 27, 2016

Norman Lee
Executive Director, Mountain Resorts Branch
Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations
PO Box 9852 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC, V8W 9T5

Re: Whistler Blackcomb Public Access to Singing Pass

Dear Mr. Lee,

We are in receipt of Tori Meeks letter of October 13, 2015 regarding access to the Singing Pass trail. Since receiving her letter we have been researching the changes that were made to the Garibaldi Provincial Park (GPP) boundaries to facilitate the operation of Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains.

Whistler Blackcomb ("WB") has run a very successful business, providing large financial and recreational benefits to BC. But it has earned most of its revenue on land, which was transferred to it from Garibaldi Park. All of the ski area above 1600 metres on both Whistler and Blackcomb, with the exception of a tiny island around the top of Garbanzo chair, was originally part of Garibaldi Park. The Roundhouse, Rendezvous and Glacier Creek restaurants, and all skiing at or above tree line are on land that was formerly part of Garibaldi Park.

An unexpected consequence of the transfer of public land to WB's ski operations is that public access to the Spearhead range part of Garibaldi park is now severely restricted.

We believe that given the huge success that WB have enjoyed operating on lands that were once part of public lands in Garibaldi park, they have a duty to restore public access to the Park to the level that existed before park lands were transferred to them. This requires summer vehicle access to a location close to the old Singing Pass parking lot, as recommended by BC Parks in their 2014 Management plan amendment for the Spearhead area and their 1990 Garibaldi Park Master plan.

We appreciate Tori Meeks' initiative to resolve this long standing issue and the progress that has been made to date on certain items. A new footbridge crossing Fitzsimmons Creek near the IPP intake would be a significant step towards achieving our goal. However, we wish to reiterate that our goal is to re-establish driving access to the Singing Pass trailhead via the existing road to the IPP intake for the following reasons:

- Our members agree that the proposed bridge will provide an alternate route, however as discussed in our previous meetings, without providing public vehicle access on the road to the IPP parking lot, the Singing Pass trail is long way from Lot 8 or the Whistler Village. It is approximately 5 km to the IPP from the Whistler Village, with just under 400 metres vertical rise, and the trail from there to Singing Pass is another 8 km. That makes for a 26 km roundtrip to Singing Pass or a 32 km roundtrip to Russet Lake, which are very long days for most people. While the bridge and connection to the existing trail would resolve the access from the IPP to the trailhead, lack of driving access to the IPP is not satisfactory. Our desire for driving access to the IPP has strong public support as documented in the February 21, 2014 Garibaldi Park Management Plan Amendment for the Spearhead Area

which states, “This should include improved access to the Singing Pass Trail, with a new vehicle-accessible trailhead.” B.C. Parks also supports driving access to the IPP as section 6 of the February 21, 2014 Garibaldi Park Management Plan Amendment for the Spearhead Area states under High Priority Strategies: “Work with adjacent land managers to establish a new vehicle-accessible trailhead on the north side of Fitzsimmons Creek to provide summer access to the Singing Pass Trail.” B.C. Parks goal to have driving access to the Singing Pass trailhead has been part of their policy for over 25 years as the September 1990 Master Plan for Garibaldi Provincial Park states in section 6.1, “These objectives are reflected in the general access strategy which bring vehicle access close to park boundaries and then provides low-impact trail access to the park’s more popular features and to wilderness access points.” Further, Section 6.2.1 states under actions “Upgrade and secure the existing trail access and staging areas at Cheakamus Lake, Singing Pass, Blackcomb and Wedgemount Lake.”

- Funds spent on building a new trail along the penstock right of way could be put to better use building a bridge at the IPP, connecting the bridge to the existing trail on the south side of Fitzsimmons Creek, and improving the existing trail crossing of Harmony Creek. We believe that most users would continue to walk or bike the existing road on the south side of Fitzsimmons Creek if they cannot drive to the IPP as walking along the Inergex penstock right of way from lot 8 is at best a minor improvement over the current situation of parking in lot 5 and walking up the Right-of-way to the old parking lot above the IPP.
- A pay for service shuttle may improve access for some hikers but coordinating your return with limited pickup times will be a challenge.
- Discounted 360 summer hiking season passes would appeal to some hikers. However, previously the cost of a one-way winter backcountry-touring pass was increased substantially by WB without consultation or explanation. The disproportionately high cost of a backcountry access pass remains in effect today despite the new RFID pass system.
- Earlier access to lifts would be a benefit to some hikers. However, many hikers start their trips in the early morning. A 7 AM start is not unusual as it allows travel during the cooler time of the day. Also during previous negotiations with other commercial recreation tenure holders, commitments were made for early access or designated parking areas only to have these benefits ignored or withdrawn by the commercial rec tenure operator after the agreement was made.

Comment on the Process

While the hiking community was the reason for these discussions to resolve the Singing Pass trail access issue we feel that we have been excluded from a majority of the discussions and have been given minimal opportunity to put forward our ideas. This has been especially frustrating since some of the dominant participants in this process have a relatively short history in Whistler and do not have the detailed historical knowledge of the area that many of our members who have been accessing the park since the 1960’s and 1970’s do. It appears that although Garibaldi Provincial Park was created for the benefit of everyone, the interests of commercial recreation tenure holders are being given precedence over public access to the park.

We now have documented evidence that there have been at least 6 changes to the GPP boundaries that benefited Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains. All of these changes have resulted in increased area for Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains and a reduction in the size of GPP. The GPP boundary changes have added over 3500 acres of available area to Whistler Mountain and over 3700 acres available to Blackcomb Mountain, although not all of this land is part of the controlled ski area at this time. 7200 acres is equivalent to 88% of their current advertised 8171 skiable acres. Clearly without the addition of this area Whistler Blackcomb would be a very minor ski resort without any skiing at or above tree line. In addition to the area removed from GPP, WB’s subsidiary Whistler Heli-Skiing, also benefits significantly from operating in GPP. While Whistler and Blackcomb have enjoyed substantial financial benefits from lands previously in GPP, the public has been negatively impacted due to impaired access to GPP. We do not understand how the interests of a private company have precedence over public access to a Class A

provincial park. Since Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains have gained from lands previously in the GPP, one would have expected greater collaboration in restoring the impaired public access to the GPP via the Singing Pass trail.

Summary

Again we appreciate the work Tori Meeks has done on this file. A Park Use Permit has now been granted for construction of three huts in the Spearhead Range. As the Singing Pass trail is a vital access route to the huts, resolving this issue is critical. Can we set-up another meeting to discuss a strategy for improving public access? Please call me at 604-935-2551 or email me at powderhounds@telus.net.

Yours truly,

Bryce Leigh
Director
Federation of Mountain Clubs of B.C.

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