



Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC

Accessing the backcountry one step at a time

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Premier Gordon Campbell, (250) 387-0089, premier@gov.bc.ca
Kevin Krueger, Min. Tourism, Culture, Arts (250) 953-4250, tca.minister@gov.bc.ca
Pat Bell, Minister of Forests, (250) 387-1040, FOR.Minister@gov.bc.ca

8 Oct 2009

Re. Sect 58 Closure of 21 Mile Creek to motorized recreation

Dear Messrs Campbell, Krueger, and Bell:

The Federation of Mountain Clubs of B.C. urgently requests a Section 58 closure for motorized recreation for the 21 Mile Creek area adjacent to Whistler. This closure should include the 21 Mile Creek drainage basin and extend over Mt. Sproatt to the Northair Mine Road and down to the parking lot near the start of the Callaghan road, where the boundary of the closure area would be clearly defined and would be easiest to enforce. We do not believe a boundary along the 21 Mile Creek watershed divide would be feasible to enforce; it would be cheaper and much easier to enforce a closure on the Callaghan side of the divide as described above.

The reasons for the closure are:

1. To provide non-motorized backcountry winter users an enjoyable and safe experience in an area designated for non-motorized winter use.

This last winter has seen numerous conflicts and much harassment of backcountry skiers by snowmobilers throughout southwestern B.C., some of which has compromised skier safety. In one instance a snowmobiler wishing to ski down a slope simply pushed his unmanned snowmobile down the slope in the adjacent Callaghan valley. The snowmobile narrowly missed a party of skiers below. In another, snowmobilers deliberately drove their machines through a skiers' campsite. These incidents are becoming increasingly common and are now being documented on the website: bivouac.com.

Snowmobile use in the Sea-to-Sky region has become a major problem with snowmobiles increasingly going into areas that are closed to them for conservation or recreation reasons. Growing numbers of snowmobilers habitually disregard the recreation zoning approved by the BC government through the LRMP process. See for

example on the next page the photo of snowmobile activity on Rainbow Lake which is within the 21 Mile Creek valley, Whistler's main drinking supply watershed, which has been zoned by the Sea-to-Sky LRMP for non-motorized use only.

One user group – snowmobilers – should not be allowed to compromise the safety and the quality of the backcountry experience for another group. Is this the image that B.C. wants to present to the world during the 2010 Olympics?

The 21 Mile Creek/Rainbow Mountain area, a particularly valuable area for one day trips, was one of the most popular and very few places that skiers and snowshoers could use without harassment from snowmobiles. There is an urgent need to regulate and provide for backcountry skiers and snowshoers so they can avoid noise pollution and air pollution, dangers caused by irresponsible snowmobile use, dangerous icy snowmobile trails and even the abusive language from some snowmobilers.



Rainbow Lake with snowmobile tracks in early April, 2009. This is well within a non-motorized area and is in Whistler's main drinking supply watershed. Photo – C. MacMillan.

2. Water Pollution

The 21 Mile Creek drainage is Whistler's watershed. Unburnt fuel from snowmobiles, sinking of snowmobiles in the lake, as has occurred at Callaghan Lake, or abandonment of snowmobiles in the watershed and driving them across erosion-prone green snowless meadows, as occurred in the nearby Brandywine meadows this year, may have a significant impact on Whistler's water supply. Non-motorized backcountry users who drink water from the area higher in the watershed are more exposed to many

more contaminants than Whistler residents. The area is closed to campers so other more highly polluting activities should be removed.

To ensure that all backcountry recreationists are treated fairly and that next winter is not a repetition of the previous one, we urge your government to place a Section 58 closure on this area and suggest that you visit the bivouac.com infractions record page (<http://www.bivouac.com/SAbxLister.asp>) to see the extent of the problem.

Yours sincerely

Brian Wood
President, FMCBC

Cc: Resort Municipality of Whistler Council