



June 6, 2013

Via email: Vicki.Haberl@gov.bc.ca
Jennie.Aikman@gov.bc.ca

BC Parks
PO Box 220
Brackendale, BC V0N 1H0

Attention: Vicki Haberl, Section Head, Planning - Squamish
Jennie Aikman, Regional Planner - Squamish

Re: Heli-ski avoidance policies
Garibaldi Provincial Park Master Plan Amendments

At one of the public open houses for the Garibaldi Provincial Park Master Plan Amendments, FMCBC and BC Parks representatives discussed avoidance policies implemented by some heli-ski operators. The BC Parks representatives indicated that they would be interested in seeing such avoidance policies.

Michael Feller made inquiries to determine the policies used by heli-ski operators to avoid conflicts with backcountry skiers and snowshoers. The results of those inquiries are summarized in Appendix A, which is enclosed with this letter.

Mr. Feller's findings reinforce our opposition to renewal of the park use permit for heli-skiing for the reasons outlined in our submissions of January 13, 2013.

The findings reinforce our position that if heli-skiing is allowed to continue in Garibaldi Park, which we strongly oppose, there must be a permit management plan, which includes performance reviews to increase accountability by the operator. The permit management plan should include the following elements, most of which are outlined in our previous submissions:

- Avoidance protocol to ensure heli-ski operators do not operate in the area when back country users are present;
- Restrictions on heli-skiing in the area on weekends, statutory holidays and peak user days or weeks;
- Monitoring of user conflicts;
- Renewal periods limited to 5 years to allow timely performance reviews and consequences for non-compliance with permit conditions; and,

- Suspension or cancellation of the park use permit for non-compliance with park permit conditions or an increase in users, which makes conflict inevitable.

The heli-ski operator's avoidance protocol should be available to the public on both the heli-ski operator's and BC Parks' website. There should be a formalized web and/or phone-based system for the public to notify the heli-ski operator of planned trips and to report infractions.

Monitoring of user conflicts must allow for public feedback. Parks cannot simply rely on self-reports of the park permit holder or haphazard public comments to BC Parks. Prior to renewal of the permit, public feedback should be solicited on the operator's performance and conflict management. This will increase accountability by both the operator and BC Parks.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions.

Yours Sincerely,

Monika Bittel

Monika Bittel
Co-Chair, FMCBC Recreation and Conservation Committee

Enclosure: Appendix A – Heli-ski avoidance policies (3 pages)



Appendix A - Heli-ski avoidance policies

Compiled by Michael Feller, April, 2013

1. Helicat Canada (Stewardship of Mountain Ecosystems - Best Practices for Sustainability, 2012)

This is the umbrella organization for all heliski companies in B.C. It has no specific recommendations for avoiding backcountry conflicts with people, unlike those for avoiding conflicts with wildlife, but does recommend the following:

1. "Commit to strategies that share resources with local users as practically as possible. Work with our staging communities in processes that seek to engage all users of the backcountry in a manner that fosters and encourages mutual respect. This respect should strive to engender a 'team' approach that creates meaningful access for public recreation users as well as fosters the ability for member organizations to operate successful commercial recreation businesses."
2. "Strive to eliminate, or mitigate all issues of conflict related to our operations (eg. operations impact, guest/resident interface, the use of tenure lands etc.)."
3. "Commit to reducing the auditory and visual impacts of our operations."
4. "Conduct our businesses in a manner that demonstrates our high ethical standards and commitment to being good corporate citizens."

2. Whistler Heli-skiing (policies given in an email to M. Feller from Mike Sadan, General Manager, Whistler Heli-Skiing, 26 March, 2013)

"... we try to avoid any direct conflicts with backcountry skiers while also avoiding very close interaction with the snowmobiling community. It's a juggle at times and avoiding one area completely, creates pressure on another. For example, we try to avoid key weekends in the Spearhead when we know there is a lot of activity out there, like the past Friday-Sunday, but then we end up in the Brandywine. It's not always perfect, but as guides, it's certainly our intent to be respectful and we talk about it at the morning meetings when we do our planning."

3. Coast Range Heliskiing (from Tenure Consolidation Management Plan, 2009)

"Any commercial recreation operator within the Sea to Sky Corridor must carefully consider public recreation users when planning operations. CRH keeps accurate records of recreational users observed within their zones during the course of operation. CRH is acutely aware of the range and locales of public recreationalists' activities in the Pemberton area. The operating areas dating back to 1999 were delineated with specific consideration to avoiding the

recreating public. Areas of concentrated use were identified and exempted from the applications.”

“3.5.1 Land Use and Conflict Avoidance

After consulting with the Sea to Sky Backcountry Forum, CRH has modified operating areas and procedures to ensure that there are no adverse impacts to public users from their operations. In addition, potential land use conflicts arising from chance contact are mitigated through careful delineation of the tenure areas and seasonal management of activity to avoid impacts. In addition, CRH proposes to use two tools to assist in avoiding conflicts:

Avoidance Response Protocol is used to actively avoid conflict through chance encounters.

Whenever a member of the public or other resource user considered to be sensitive to the presence of helicopters, is encountered, the pilot immediately withdraws to a safe distance and selects a new site to land or route to fly.”

In an email to M. Feller on 20 March, 2013, Tyler Freed, President of Coast Range Heliskiing stated “CRH holds a significant priority on avoiding conflict with public recreationalists, although at times shared use within terrain areas is unavoidable. Prior communication with public groups significantly enhances the ability to manage land use and terrain area decisions and allows all users to eliminate, as best as possible, chance encounters. Through in depth discussions with the Alpine Club/VOC/Backcountry Forum during the commercial tenuring process areas were identified, removed or altered from commercial tenure application to respect high use public recreational areas. Significant increases in use of the backcountry in recent years has also contributed to further challenges for all backcountry users. This includes a tremendous increase of public snowmobile use in historical areas of use and areas of non traditional use due to technological advances of snowmobiles and little to no government regulation. Other factors are also taken into consideration when selecting tenure areas of use by commercial operators that include: snow stability, snow quality and localized weather and flying conditions.”

4. Canadian Mountain Holidays (from email by Dave Butler, CMH Director of Sustainability, to M. Feller on 20 March, 2013)

“We don’t have specific written guidelines for conflict avoidance, although our most recent sustainability report provides some important context to the way we look at the world around us.

In general, we do all we can to ensure we do not affect the experience of others. Part of that comes through involvement in, and support of land use plans (which we see as a key tool to ensure users know where they can go to get a certain kind of experience). Part of it also comes through our work to avoid interactions and impacts by being aware of (and avoiding as much as we can) any known public use areas at times when users are likely there. We hope users will contact us and let us know where they’re going to be so that we can proactively plan, rather than react when we notice someone in our operating area. In the winter,

there is an extra level of care due to avalanche risk, and communication and awareness becomes even more critical for all involved.”

5. **Mike Wiegele Heliskiing** (from website, April, 2013)

Has the same policies as recommended by Helicat Canada (above).

6. **Tyax or TLH Heliskiing**

TLH have extensive tenured areas in the Lillooet Icecap – Southern Chilcotin area. No less than 6 phone calls and 2 emails failed to get a response to my questions. The TLH website is uninformative about tenure areas and avoidance policies. They are either unwilling or unable to supply the necessary information.