



WESTERN CANADA
**WILDERNESS
COMMITTEE**

NATIONAL OFFICE

227 Abbott Street Vancouver, BC V6B 2K7
Phone: 604-683-8220 Fax: 604-683-8229
www.wildernesscommittee.org

Premier Dogged By Water War on BC's 6th Most Endangered River

Big White To Take 30,000 Swimming Pools* Of Kettle River Water Annually River Stewards Say "Give It Back"

Vancouver, BC. December 1, 2008 – A proposal hatched by the BC Government on behalf of a ski resort would see a 256% increase in water withdrawals from one of BC's most endangered rivers. Record low water flows in recent years have heightened scientific concerns over the fate of the Kettle River, whose fisheries have seen marked declines in recent years according to BC Government studies. As a result, citizens, some local mayors and councils, and the Boundary Regional District have all requested that the Provincial Government either ditch the plan, or hold comprehensive Public Hearings on the matter. These requests have been ignored. A recent promise by Premier Campbell to consult with the public is a good first step, but entirely inadequate given the severity of threats to the Kettle River.

"Big White owners say they have no current need for the water but that they may need it for future snow-making and development", says local river steward Al Grant. "Big White also has plans for golf-courses, required to make Big White a year round resort. If Big White becomes a year round resort their water needs will skyrocket and the Kettle River will suffer even more."

BC's Water Stewardship Branch, the BC Minister of the Environment, and Big White owners have all stated that proposed water withdrawals will have an insignificant effect on the Kettle River both as to the amount and timing of the withdrawals during snow-melt, spring runoff or "freshet." However there is a complete lack of science to support the claim of minimal environmental impacts. The reality is that what little is known about the Kettle is that its fisheries are suffering and that the river flow is dependent on stored groundwater supplied in large part by the spring freshet.

A second significant contribution of a strong freshet is the beneficial effect on fish habitat. Scouring and cleaning of channels and gravels, deposition of large woody debris in the form of uprooted trees or stumps has a significant impact on improving fish habitat. The BC Ministry of Environment has recent studies that show the Kettle is an under-performing river in terms of fish populations. Those studies have recommended that fish habitat improvement be conducted at public expense. Such expense can provide a public benefit but it is an absurdity for the BC government to be promoting and overseeing such activities while at the same time suggesting a reduction in the very water flows that fish habitat is dependent on.

A limited environmental assessment on only certain aspects of the water withdrawal plan will be conducted by Big White, but even this minimal data will be privately owned and therefore not available to the public. The assessments will not address the overall impact of increased development, snow making, effluent production, water saving options tied to development etc, but would be confined to assessing the local impact of the reservoirs, pump-stations and lines, on the local flora and fauna.

Boundary Alliance has requested that Big White withdraw their application or that the Water Stewardship Branch of the BC government reject the application, until such time as studies, and a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan are in place for the Kettle. They suggest the immediate formation of an Independent Advisory to guide Kettle River conservation.

figure obtained by dividing Big White's 3 billion litre total water license by 100,000 litre average size of backyard concrete swimming pool
For more information contact Al Grant of Boundary Alliance @ 250-446 2372, www.boundaryalliance.org
Fred Marshall @ 250 445 6496 or Andy Miller, Staff Scientist @ the Wilderness Committee @ 604-683-8220.

