

## **BOUNDARY ENVIRONMENTAL ALLIANCE**

<http://www.boundaryalliance.org>

### **BIG WHITE UPDATE JAN 2012**

Big White's application to extract water from the Kettle River for snowmaking, golf course irrigation and other purposes remains a threat to the Kettle.

Big White's expansion and development plan also proposes to expand into an Ecological Reserve [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XQ1i\\_5Zj53A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XQ1i_5Zj53A)

We have asked the question: Will the Kettle Watershed Management Planning process underway prevent these assaults on Public Resources? We say the answer is no, with present leadership and direction predominantly being provided by folks who have contributed to Kettle River Watershed problems by actions, policies or the lack of them.

The water application is effectively providing Big White with a reservation on Kettle River Water, a reservation that remains until Big White decides to proceed further with their expansion and development plans. When the BC Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Arts invited Big White to apply for the water, that Ministry advised Big White to take advantage of shortcomings in the Water Act and to advance a claim that was not intended in the Act, in order to stake a claim on Kettle River Water. You are invited to consider the ethics of MTCA's invite to Big White and the nature of the incestuous relationship that can exist between Government agencies and private business. The MTCA invite can be seen in the footnote<sup>1</sup>

We know from statements by various Provincial Government officials that Gov't has indicated its willingness to approve Big White's water application. Ministry of Environment, Water Branch, Allocation Section Head, Conrad Pryce (who has the authority to approve the application) and Ministry of Environment Regional Hydrologist Phil Epp and others have indicated they have no concerns with the application. Mr Epp, the 'go-to' media source, in addition to promoting the red-herring of insignificant effect at Midway during freshet, also claimed no losses of any significance would occur from evaporation/transpiration. As a result of these Ministry claims, Kootenay Boundary Regional District, Head Administrator, John McLean, would later publicly claim that on the basis of discussions with Epp, he and the District were of the opinion that the Big White

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<sup>1</sup> MTCA's invite to Big White: see pages 2 thru 4 [http://www.boundaryalliance.org/cambell\\_sassurances.pdf](http://www.boundaryalliance.org/cambell_sassurances.pdf)

In another example of the indecent relationship between Government and private interests, it has been MTCA practice to appoint Big White's Development Consultant as **the Provincial Governments own agent** to push through development applications at the Regional District level.

proposed withdrawals were not a problem. For further detail on this “no net loss” theory and the realities, see footnote.<sup>2</sup>

In Spring 2011 we had the opportunity to question hydrologist Phil Epp and Provincial Fisheries Biologist Tara White about the Big White water application. Mr Epp was no longer Regional Hydrologist having left Government, but Gov’t and Ms White rehired him on a contract as a consultant, to assist in a study of Kettle flows, temperatures, fisheries issues in the Kettle. At a meeting Mr Epp repeated his claim that the Big White application was not a problem. We took issue with that statement and asked if he was aware that streamflow data Gov’t referenced on a stream in the Big White area was ancient and in any event irrelevant as several other Big White licences were issued since that data collection was terminated about 30 years ago. Whether he was aware (in view of his comments claiming insignificant losses from evaporation/transpiration) that losses could in fact exceed 50% of the licence from a combination of evaporation, transpiration, sublimation from snow making (think of a kind of evaporation) and evaporation from sewage canals where intended return to groundwater is inhibited by biofilms created by nutrient rich sewage. Whether he was aware (contrary to claims made by Water Branch) that late season flows would be intercepted by the proposed storage ponds, (conveniently replacing storage pond evaporation) and would therefore be lost to the Kettle at a critical late season period. Whether he was aware that a storage pond constructed for an earlier licence exceeded licenced capacity by 21%. For a bit more detail on these “losses” see footnote.<sup>3</sup>

Mr Epp & Ms White both indicated that “they didn’t know what to say” and Mr Epp suggested that maybe he needed to go and take a look at Big White. We then offered to show him around, but we have not heard from him since.

How might the Watershed Management Plan respond to the Big White claim on water? Good question.

- With a non-functioning Steering Committee that has not met since Regional District E Electoral Representative Bill Baird became Chair in Spring 2011.

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<sup>2</sup> See Item 1, Press Release Jan 2010, pdf page 1.

[http://www.boundaryalliance.org/pressrelease\\_openletter\\_jan2010.pdf](http://www.boundaryalliance.org/pressrelease_openletter_jan2010.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See pdf pages 3 & 4 [http://www.boundaryalliance.org/pressrelease\\_openletter\\_jan2010.pdf](http://www.boundaryalliance.org/pressrelease_openletter_jan2010.pdf) and page 3 [http://www.boundaryalliance.org/bigwhiteplan\\_notesmar09.pdf](http://www.boundaryalliance.org/bigwhiteplan_notesmar09.pdf)

- A Steering Committee Chair, Bill Baird, who incorrectly claims that Big White have withdrawn their water application. See our Nov 2011 Report Card on Baird and his more recent claim that Big White withdrew the application.<sup>4</sup>
- A Regional District that has produced a Community Plan that strongly encourages Big White to construct Golf Course(s), a Regional District that prefers to believe in the red-herrings and inadequate assessments of the Provincial Water Allocation Branch.
- A Watershed Management “Technical Committee” which doesn’t work with the absent “Steering Committee” or communicate with it in any way for almost a year. A Technical Committee which according to the Terms of Reference was supposed to be selected by the Steering Committee, however the Steering Committee not only didn’t get to give any input into the selection, it has not been advised of who is on the Technical Committee. Is this dysfunction or what?
- A Technical Committee largely composed of Government Reps whose decisions, policies, actions or failure to act, have led to most of the threats to the Watershed.

When we (and the petitioners) called for a Watershed Management Plan for the Kettle, we cautioned that the process needed to be broadly inclusive from day 1, needed to be transparent and focussed on the long term health of the Kettle basin. We cautioned against a process where Government agencies who have largely contributed to Kettle problems, are in charge of planning, and of the risk of extractive stakeholders getting to divvy up the resource for personal benefit.

In 2011 the Kettle was designated Number One Endangered River by the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC (ORCA) after many years climbing up the rungs to that unenviable position. It appears unlikely that the Kettle’s status will improve under present management. ORCA reports:

[http://www.orcbc.ca/pro\\_endangered.htm](http://www.orcbc.ca/pro_endangered.htm)

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[http://www.boundaryalliance.org/ba\\_009.htm](http://www.boundaryalliance.org/ba_009.htm)

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<sup>4</sup> See mention in Report Card of Baird’s failure to meet his promise 3 years ago (when seeking re-election) re Big White issues and the proposed Watershed Management Plan. At the 2011 all-candidates meeting, Baird referred to comments about his earlier broken promise by stating that Big White had withdrawn their water application. That suggestion implied that criticism of his earlier broken promise was irrelevant. It was not possible for us to confirm until after the election that Mr Baird’s claim was incorrect. See Report Card of Nov 2011:

<http://www.boundaryalliance.org/baird.pdf>