

RDEK Jumbo vote will be close

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With the momentous showdown on the Jumbo Glacier Ski Resort drawing ever closer, both sides of the divisive debate say the vote is going to be close.

Regional District of East Kootenay (RDEK) Board directors will vote Friday on a motion to allow the province to make the contentious decision, which is generally seen as a go ahead for the controversial resort.

Jumbo Glacier Resort spokesman Grant Costello says this would please him and resort developer Oberto Oberti who have been pursuing the mammoth resort development for more than 15 years.

"If the motion passes Friday it means it will have been worth all the struggle and effort," he says.

The motion, requesting the province establish a special municipality in the area covered by the Jumbo Master Plan, will likely be passed by one vote whichever way it goes, he says.

Despite this Costello remains guardedly optimistic.

"We are confident the RDEK directors will recognize the thoroughness of the process Glacier Resorts Ltd. has been through, the changes we have made to improve project and the fact that the project has passed every hurdle put before it and now its time to bring its many benefits to the region."

But Wildsight Program Manager Dave Quinn says Jumbo would be built in an area already saturated with ski resorts and be a net detriment to the area.

"The wild heart of a mountain range like the Purcells is not an appropriate location for a mega development such as this. This proposed real estate speculation is 55 km from the nearest community, Invermere and is truly 'un Kootenay' as anyone could ask for."

Quinn, and other Jumbo critics, claim close to 90 per cent of the people in the East Kootenay oppose the Jumbo project, but Costello says he doesn't buy this. "The claim is at least a distortion of the facts if not an outright misrepresentation."

Costello says support for the resort is "universal" in the East Kootenay business community and also strong among ordinary citizens.

"We're now seeing the public at large respond to our request for letters and we have received virtually hundreds since January 4th."

But Quinn says a resort like Jumbo does not fit the lifestyle of Kootenay people. "Residents of the Kootenays whether they are fourth generation or recently retired from Ontario or the Coast, have one thing in common.

"The love the Kootenays for what they are not. They are not Whistler, they are not Vail and they are not Europe. Jumbo is a proposal to trade our public land for private

profit at the expense of the Kootenay lifestyle, all for the sake of a four-season ski resort on melting glaciers 55 km up a rugged, avalanche prone valley."

But it's the glaciers, the high altitude and year-round ski season that makes Jumbo stand out from other ski resorts in the area and such an attractive development, says Costello.

"Jumbo is almost twice as high as Whistler and because of that you have lower temperatures in the summer and snow every month of the year which no other (B.C.) resort can offer," he says.

However, Quinn says there are 19 ski facilities within a five-hour drive of Jumbo and skier visits are already on the decline.

"We need to look after our communities and existing resorts in need of all the ski business they can get. We are not interested in losing business from our existing resorts for clearly unsustainable real estate speculation such as Jumbo."

The vote on the motion will take place during the regular RDEK board meeting March 3. A packed house is expected.